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FEATURE DETECTIVE STORY

"DIRECT ACTION"

by

DR. HARRY ENTON

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Please Take Notice

WE surprised our readers by giving them more stories in this edition than we announced. That's our habit—always trying to please our subscribers. Now we are going to give you an idea of what the next number will contain, but you will find that the quality and quantity will be far better and greater than anything we can say here. First and foremost, there will be a splendid feature detective novelette containing a most startling mystery. It is full of pep, excitement and suspense—one of the kind that arouses one's interest to the fever-point. Do not fail to read

"The Footprints On The Ceiling"

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As an added special attraction we will give you the first installment of a wonderful two-part story entitled

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It is one of the finest stories ever written by these famous authors of detective fiction, and equals any of the "Craig Kennedy" series, written by Mr. Reeve. **Tell your friends about this rare treat.**

AMONG THE SHORT STORIES WILL BE

"Two of a Kind," by St. George Rathbone
"As Per Schedule," by J. B. Warrenton
"Demon Stiletto in Pursuit," by Henry W. Fisher
"While the Lights Were Out," by A. B. Monroe

The special article, "HOW THE LOFT THIEVES WORK," was written exclusively for this magazine by EDWIN A. GOEWEY, and gives a comprehensive description of the inner workings of the New York police department while capturing law-breakers.

There will, of course, be considerably more than is enumerated above, for we will also print a number of odd and interesting items of exceptional merit.

Be Sure to Get a Copy of Our Next Number!

THE EDITOR.

DIRECT ACTION!

by

Dr. Harry Enton

CHAPTER ONE

THE man in the stylishly made spring suit was rather short but very broad. His chest swelled in a way that instinctively made one think of a pouter-pigeon, his muscular arms threatened the seams of his sleeves and his legs held the same menace for his trousers. As he swung along Broadway with a powerful stride, the glance he cast at each pretty woman he met was a visual insult of such quality as to bring a resentful blush to more than one fair cheek. As for the men who were strolling along enjoying the mild May day, his every glance at them was in the nature of a challenge. He was in a jubilant mood and enjoying the license which his powerful figure enabled him to luxuriate in, but his self-complacency received a rude shock when a hand of unusual weight and strength gripped one of his shoulders with such steel-trap power that he was brought to a sudden and ungraceful stop.

"Hello, Orloff!" greeted his ears, and the voice was so far above him that he instinctively put back his head as he looked up to see who had so unceremoniously interrupted his swaggering progress. He was in the grasp of a blond Hercules of six feet four, who was gazing down upon him with a calm expression. One long look Orloff bestowed upon the face, and then he nodded his head, as though assenting to some mentally put query in relation to the monster who was holding him motionless with such superb ease."

"Elbow?" he asked.

"Yes," was the soft reply.

"Well," snarled Orloff, "suppose you are, what then? You've got nothing on me, not a thing."

"Not a thing, just as you say," was the pleasant response, and now the giant took his heavy hand from Orloff's shoulder. "If I had wanted to pinch you, do you think you could have slipped out of these grappling irons?"

As he spoke he suddenly thrust forth his hands.

Orloff fairly gasped as he looked, for never had he seen such a pair of hands in his life. The palms at which he gazed were fully four and a half inches in diameter, the enormously thick fingers were not less than four inches long and terminated in well-kept, curving nails that somehow suggested the claws of a tiger. For fully half a minute Orloff stared at the enormous hands as though he were fascinated, and then he looked up once more and said:

"I never saw you before, but there can-

not be two such pairs of hands in this part of the world. You are Big Mitt Sysonby."

"That's what they call me," admitted the other.

"I was sure of it," said Orloff. "Well, you belong to the United States Secret Service and you've stopped me on the street, and yet you say it isn't a pinch; so what is it?"

"Why, Orloff," was the mild reply, "I only want to have a ten or fifteen minutes talk with you."

"What about?" was the suspicious question.

"That you will learn when we are seated comfortably in the private room of a saloon, with a bottle of mineral water and some good cigars to make things sociable between us," answered Sysonby. "Here is The Gem, one of the places where I can get whatever I order. Come on in, and let's get away from the curiosity of the passers-by."

"I'll go you," assented Orloff, and he followed the big detective into the handsome saloon. Sysonby nodded familiarly to the bartender.

"Joe," he said to the latter, "I want a room, a bottle of vichy, two glasses, some of your best cigars and a folder of safety matches."

The bartender nodded, turned to a small keyrack and handed over a key to which a tag was attached. Then he placed the rest of the order on a tray, and after the big Secret Service man had paid the bill the loaded tray was carried to one of several compartments at the rear of the saloon, where Sysonby unlocked the door and ushered his guest into the small room and locked the door.

Sysonby and Orloff had scarcely entered the compartment when the door of the saloon opened to admit a small, dark, foreign-looking man, who closed the door softly behind him and then advanced to the bar with a noiseless tread, indicating that he wore "sneakers." Not a word did he say, but first tilted his head toward the row of little rooms and then raised his eyebrows inquiringly, and in response to the mute interrogation the bartender held up four fingers. Then the foreign-looking man held up three fingers and the bartender handed over a key to which was attached a tag marked number three. Still mute, and moving without a sound, the foreign-looking man quietly entered the compartment adjoining the one occupied by Sysonby and Orloff and locked himself in.

In compartment number four Sysonby opened the bottle and poured the two glasses brimming full. Orloff smacked his lips over the beverage, and then lit one of the fine cigars with evident appreciation.

"And now," requested Orloff, sitting back luxuriously in his chair and blowing the fragrant smoke through his nose in true Russian style, "suppose you begin your little spiel?"

"I will," assented Sysonby, "and in order to show you that I know you from away back, I'll go over the various lines you've been in. You've worked the confidence racket, you've been a hold-up man, you've been a queer-shover, a strong-arm man in strikes, a peterman for a short time, then you quit that to be a gunman. After that experience you became a layer-down for a gang of writers. You've got two convictions against you for felonies, and eighteen months ago you got a ten-year stretch, but you hypnotized the parole board with your tears and your sobbing desire to live an honest life, and you got out of stir. I am narrating all this to show you that I've got you down fine, and to make it plain to you that your arrest and conviction for another felony would mean a life sentence as an habitual criminal. Furthermore, to make it clearer to you, with your record laid before the parole board you would stay in the jug until you croaked. Have I made all this perfectly plain?"

Orloff eyed him reflectively for fully a minute.

He was a shrewd fellow, and dimly gathered that all this talk was meant to lead up to something. The crook was vainly trying to fathom what might be the idea that prompted the interview, but the face he gazed at was a mask that told him nothing, and finally he blurted out:

"Well, what does this all amount to?

Since the board let me out I've lived as I told them I would, and there's not a thing on me. I was a crook, just as you say, but since I came out I've run straight."

"Orloff," was the quiet rejoinder, "you are a thief, and your father and mother were thieves, and it's in your blood to go crooked. If I had my records with me I could give you the exact date, and the very hour, when you laid down a check for a thousand dollars that the writers had given you to cash, but I do know it was not two months after you came out of the jug. My men had been trailing you for a week, and they told me that you had spent the previous night carousing with a lot of your old pals, although you had been told by the layers to be sure and present the paper the minute the bank opened for business. I have doped the matter out and concluded that you woke up late, threw on your clothing and got out in a hurry without washing your hands and face, and that your fingers were grimy. Then when the cashier looked past the men ahead of you in the line and favored you with a searching gaze you had a fright and the sweat started out on you, although the reason he looked so keenly at you was because you strongly resembled a former friend. But when you stood in front of the window he saw at once that both your eyes were dark blue, while his former chum had one blue eye and one gray one. The dirt on your fingers and the sweat had combined to leave fingerprints of unusual legibility, and when the cashier's suspicions were aroused by your agitation, and an investigation was made a few minutes later, the fraud was discovered. With the check in my hands the identity of the layer-down was soon established. So, Orloff, if you're pinched for that job you will not only be convicted by the fingerprints, but also by the positive identification of the cashier, and the case against you is cinched. Now do you say there isn't a thing against you?"

Anger flamed up in the face of the trapped criminal, and his right hand moved slowly toward the upper portion of his waistcoat. But the smiling, keen-eyed detective noted the movement and held up his hand restrainedly.

"Don't do it, Orloff," he said. "You might kill me, but you would only hasten the result. You could not leave this saloon without a signal from me at the front door to two men I have posted there. After they had nabbed you the case would be handled by my partner, who has a copy of all the papers in it. So you see, Orloff, I've got you dead to rights, and you've got to meet my terms."

Then the crook clearly understood his position and did not waste any more time fencing, but blurted out in a snarling tone:

"What do you want?"

"Ah, now you're talking business," said Sysonby, "and we can line up and kick a goal without trouble. That affair with the check had shaken your nerve, for you dropped the writers and accepted an offer to become a member of an Anarchist Direct Action group for the Russian gold, with which they are well supplied. At the command of those who direct such activities you have already sent three men to the hospital crippled for life, and your successes have made you a figure of importance in the Direct Action group. And now, as I have learned, you are entrusted with the secrets of that inner body, and know the names of the men who are marked for either assault of a crippling character or death. What I want from you is that list of marked men. I am giving you your choice between giving it to me or going to the stone jug for life. Don't think for a moment that you can fool me with a fake confession, for I know enough at the present minute to trip you up in the first lie you try to tell. Well, all my cards are on the table, and it's up to you to say how the game shall be played."

"But," almost plaintively burst forth Orloff, the sweat standing out on his face as he puffed fiercely at his cigar, and then hastily poured another glass of mineral water down his throat, "don't you see that you're not really giving me any sort of a chance? If I refuse, it's jail for life, and on the other hand I am sure to be assassinated! Don't you see that?"

"No, I don't," was the reassuring answer, "and I'll explain why. I've had this matter

under consideration for some time, and I've thought out every phase of the question, for it was too important to be spoiled by overlooking any possible detail that might step in to mar it. Now, to begin with, after giving me what I want, and assuming that the group learns of it, will you be any more in danger than any member of the national police? Are we not in danger of death at any moment, night or day? You know that that is so, for it was you who disguised yourself as a Chinese hatchet-man and killed Cardigan when he had secured evidence that would have sent you up for a double stretch. But I tell you that there is no way in which anything can be traced to you in this matter. After we have collared the gang, and either sent them up or deported them, I'll get you five hundred dollars from the stool-pigeon fund and see that you get regular employment at good pay. Until that time, Orloff, you will be under the protection of the United States Secret Service, and I'll back the force against your Direct Action group. You will be valuable to us, and we will give you ample and constant protection."

A gleam of hope came into the eyes of the trapped criminal, and Sysonby watched him with expectant gaze. For fully two minutes longer the two men sat facing each other, drawing on their cigars, and then suddenly Orloff seemed to come to a decision.

"I'll take the chance," he said, "for I can see that you've got the goods on me and I'm in for a life sentence, which is something positive, while the other aspect of the matter is merely a risk. I'm banking on your crowd to protect me because I can make myself of great value to you. Yes, I'll come clean, and it will be straight goods, too."

"That's a sensible decision on your part," said the detective, drawing forth a notebook and a pencil, "and to further convince you that there is no possibility of escape I'm not even going to ask you to hand over the two guns you constantly carry."

Then for over a quarter of an hour Orloff talked and Sysonby made notes in the book which he had placed on the table.

CHAPTER TWO

At the end of the quarter-hour the detective asked a number of questions which the now fully submissive crook answered freely, and then the giant arose and carefully put away his well-filled notebook in an inner pocket and buttoned up his coat.

"So you understand that you will be arrested tomorrow, and charged with counterfeiting, which is about the only criminal charge which could not be truthfully brought against you? That is clear? I'll promise you a week in pleasant confinement after you have been remanded by the judge, and I'll make it my business to see that you have plenty to drink and smoke during that week. Before the time is up we'll collar the Direct Action gang, and they'll be too busy with their own affairs to pay any attention to you, even allowing that any suspicion attaches to you. Long before you have spent the last dollar of the five hundred every member of the group will either be in a government prison or deported from the country. Now I'll see that you get away from here without trouble."

Unlocking the door, the Secret Service man conducted Orloff to the entrance of the saloon and passed him out through the portal. He made a peculiar movement of his hand, and when two men who had been lounging in a nearby doorway showed an absorbed interest in the trolley wires, the big detective indicated them to the crook with a grin, and then dismissed him with a sidewise movement of his head. For a moment Sysonby stood there with a well-pleased expression on his face, and then he walked away murmuring:

"It's the big job of my career, and the best that anybody has done in over five years. Washington is bound to recognize it!"

Well pleased with his afternoon's work, and enjoying the assured approbation which it would bring him, the big detective hailed a taxi and gave an address in Eighteenth street. Shortly after he entered the hallway of a tall building given up to bachelor apartments and nodded familiarly to the

negro telephone operator and the dusky individual who stood outside the elevator.

"Hello, Eph; hello, Sam."

"Howdo, Mistuh Sysonby," was the prompt response.

"Anything new?" asked Sysonby.

"Nothin' new, sah," was the response in chorus, and then the detective got into the elevator and was speedily deposited by Sam at the fifth floor, where a very small electric bulb dispelled the gloom sufficiently to enable one to proceed along the corridor. Sysonby walked to the rear and paused outside a closed door which was furnished with two Yale locks, one placed at an ordinary level and the other about a foot above it. Taking a bunch of keys from his trousers pocket the detective ran his thumbnail over several until the edge of the nail fell into a slight nick. He glided the engaged nail out of the nick and ran it farther back, and when it encountered no more depressions he muttered:

"One," and at once inserted that key into the lower lock, turned it half way to the right, withdrew it, and then ran the nail over other of the keys until his slowly moving thumbnail slipped into the depressions in succession.

"Two," he said, as a scholar might recite a lesson, and then that key was used to unlock the upper Yale lock, after which Sysonby turned the knob and threw open the lock; by so doing he evidently operated a uniquely located switch, for the room beyond was at once lighted with a brilliance that made the feeble illuminated corridor dark by contrast. Before crossing the threshold the detective peered sharply into the interior of the light-flooded apartment, and then passed in and pushed the door, which locked itself with a perceptible double snap.

"Now to phone the joyful news to my partner," muttered Sysonby. He passed by the house extension telephone set, which stood on the flat desk that graced the middle of the room, and proceeded to a booth that stood in a corner farthest from the door. There he called up the New York headquarters of the Service, and asked for his partner. In less than a minute a familiar voice saluted his ear:

"This is Maitland."

"And this is Sysonby."

"And from the chuckle in the voice I should say that it is a happy Sysonby."

"Grapenuts," responded the big detective, and the jubilant ring in the suggestive word must have conveyed a peculiar meaning to Maitland, for he exhibited intense excitement in his tones when he asked:

"Do you mean our big job?"

"Exactly that."

"And you got what you wanted?"

"Yes, old man, I got what I wanted, and very much more than I expected. I tell you it is the best thing in the Service this year, and is going to do something for us with the people at Washington."

"The glory belongs to you."

"None of that, Maitland. We've worked along different lines on this matter, but your part dovetailed into mine, and my report will make that plain. We're partners, but we are also pals and friends, and in this we share. Say, I'm boiling over with eagerness to show you what I've got in my notebook, so hustle up here just as lively as you can."

"I'm as eager to see it as you to show it, but I've got to wait here to put in a personal report on that treason matter, and the Chief will not be back for an hour, or perhaps longer."

"Then I've got to curb my eagerness to exhibit what I've got like a kid with a new toy. But here is something that you will have to attend to at once, for any delay in such matters is dangerous. I've got a list of five persons who are marked for either disabling assault or death. Here are the names and addresses from the book, as I took them down today, and I would suggest that two good men be assigned to guard each case."

"Go ahead," said Maitland, and then Sysonby slowly read several names and also the addresses for each from his notebook.

"I'll repeat them," said Maitland, and he slowly read back all that his partner had given him.

"Correct," said Sysonby, as he closed the book and put it away in his pocket. "Say, Maitland, you had better have a bite to eat

and stop in for some good cigars on your way up, because we'll be talking our plans over until the small hours of the morning. I'm so excited that I doubt I'll get a wink of sleep."

"All right; goodby."

"Goodby," said Sysonby, and hung up.

The big detective sat down at the flat-top desk and fell into a reverie, and that it was pleasing in the highest degree was evident from the succession of smiles that constantly rippled across his face. Suddenly an idea seem to strike him with unusual force, for he immediately sat up and his eyes sparkled.

"Of course it will," he said, as though convincingly answering a mental question in the affirmative. "It's the big job of the year, and it will secure me the vacation I have longed for, and permit me to go abroad and hunt for my missing son. Oh, how I long to feel the clasp of his hand and look into his eyes, which always met mine with affection! It is over six months since the war ended, and not a word has come from him, nor have I been able to obtain the slightest clue to his whereabouts. He was not in the lists of the killed or the wounded, and was not mustered out of the service. He has simply vanished from the face of the earth, and when my report goes in to Washington I'll add these facts in a plain statement, and ask for a few months off to seek for my lost boy. The last time I heard from him——"

The jingling bell of the house telephone broke in upon his soliloquy, and he drew the instrument towards him.

"Hello!"

"Am dat you, Mistuh Sysonby?"

"Yes, Eph."

"Well, sah, dar am a visitor fo' you, sah."

"What's the name, Eph?"

"It's a lady, sah."

"She must give her name, Eph."

There followed an instant of delay, during which the detective tried to think what female might have business with him, and then Eph's voice came clearly through the phone:

"She says to tell yo' dat she brings news about yo' son."

The blood rushed in a torrent to Sysonby's face and then receded, leaving him deadly pale, and his hand shook so that the receiver rattled against his head as he spoke gaspingly and stammeringly into the transmitter:

"S-say that again, Eph."

"Ah done tole yo', sah, dat de lady says she brings news about yo' son."

"Send her up at once, Eph," the agitated man managed to gasp, "and tell Sam that he need not accompany her to the door, because I will be there to receive her."

Then he hung up and leaned back in his chair, shaking from head to foot with excitement, for his missing son was inexpressibly dear to him. The prospect of obtaining information about the boy shook the big detective as nothing else in the world could have done. With a great effort he pulled himself together and, striding to the door, opened it and stood at the threshold to greet this very welcome guest. A moment later the elevator stopped at the floor and a tall and graceful woman stepped out and glided towards him.

CHAPTER THREE

"STEP inside," said Sysonby, and bowed her into the room. Then he followed, closed the door, and advanced to his favorite seat at his desk, indicating an armchair opposite him, and waving his hand towards it in mute invitation. Not until then did he glance at his visitor. He saw a tall, finely-formed woman who was possibly thirty-five years of age. Her face was so exquisitely beautiful that Sysonby, in spite of his agitation, could not repress an involuntary start. But the absorbing question in his mind banished every other consideration, and as the woman seated herself he turned eagerly to her, and there was a perceptible shake in his voice as he said:

"You say you have news of my son?"

"I do," was the answer, in a voice of such honeyed sweetness as to constitute a charm in itself.

"Is he alive?"

"Yes."

"Thank God!" and all his intense relief was concentrated in the two words of thanksgiving.

This did not escape the woman, and an expression of triumph gleamed for the first time in her large, brilliant, almost oriental eyes. She permitted herself to smile confidently as she saw the agitated man grasp the edge of the desk to offset the trembling of his limbs.

"I should judge that you love your son very dearly," she said, her lustrous eyes on his face, and it might be gathered that she was mentally weighing and measuring the man as she made the casual remark.

"He is more than a son to me," fervently responded the detective. "He aided me in my work and was brainy and brave and resourceful. No father and son were ever more devotedly attached. Where is he?"

"He was taken prisoner at Kut, thrown into a filthy Turkish prison, and there he lies at the present time, sick with a wasting disease which the indifference of the prison doctor will bring to a foregone conclusion unless the sufferer is speedily released and removed to a hospital. Help must come if the young man is to be saved."

"But," eagerly said Sysonby, "you assert that he is a prisoner of war, and the war has been over a long time."

"I am perfectly aware of that," admitted the woman, "but you fail to bear in mind what else I said, and that is that he is in a Turkish prison. If you are as well informed as I thought you were, you must know that the Turkish prisons are controlled by the Germans. Your son, unfortunately, deeply offended a German officer of high rank, and this man has simply instructed the warden of the prison to forget that your boy lies sick in a filthy cell."

"Merciful Heaven!" gasped the detective, placing his hands before his eyes as though to shut out a mental vision. "But where is he?"

"That," responded the sweet voice, "is something that you shall know when you consent to the terms I shall lay down. Now listen attentively, and you can understand in a moment why it is that I know about your son when even your own government is in ignorance of his illegal incarceration, and simply regards him as one of the many who are mysteriously missing.

"For two years," explained the woman, "I was the housekeeper of the warden of this particular prison, and during that time I kept my eyes and ears open and found out so much about him that when it came to a rupture between us I gave him the proofs that I held his liberty in the hollow of my hand. He knows at this minute that I have only to exhibit my proofs of his crime to insure his incarceration for life in a prison fortress. I compelled him to correspond with and keep me informed of what came under his notice. One can never tell when something is learned in that way how useful it may be, and it was through his letters that I learned about your son. Well, so much for that. Now for something else.

"This afternoon you coerced a man named Orloff into a private room of a saloon, laid before him the proofs of your ability to send him to jail for life, and under that threat and the promise of protection by the United States Secret Service you got him to give you a full account of events scheduled to soon remove certain obstructionists from the path that we are blazing to make the world free!"

"Ah! You are an Anarchist!" the detective muttered.

Her brilliant eyes gleamed with a fanatical light, and she leaned over the desk and fairly hissed:

"Orloff will not enjoy the result of his treachery! Within seventy-two hours he will be a dead man. So much for him. Now for you:

"I want that list of names and addresses which you wrote down this afternoon, and in return for it you shall not only know where your beloved son lies facing death through disease and neglect, but I will do more than that, for I will personally cable orders to the warden to have the boy at once removed to a hospital, furnished with money and every possible care and attention, and then shipped as soon as possible to New York. I tell you that warden is in my power and will do exactly as I say. Accept

this proposition, and in a few weeks your son will be with you alive and well; refuse it and he will soon die like a dog in that Turkish jail!"

For a moment the big detective stood staring unseeingly at her, and it was plain that he was thinking deeply, but in a moment he had mentally decided the problem, and his voice was calm and matter-of-fact when he said:

"I decline."

Had the answer been delivered in thunderous tones the woman could not have been more startled. She shook with the intensity of her emotions and regarded Sysonby with incredulous eyes.

"Have you fully comprehended what I told you?" she demanded.

"Yes, fully," was the quiet response, "and now I want to make you comprehend my attitude in relation to it. You have given me to understand that my son lies sick in a Turkish prison, forgotten at the command of the German fiend who dominates the warden; that the latter is in your power, and that you alone can set my boy free. And I say to you that with the information you have put in my hands I am in a position to set in motion the vast and powerful resources of the American Government and comb Turkey as with a finetooth comb until my boy is found and set free at the command of the United States. If it be written in the Book of Fate that I fail, then I shall have the consoling knowledge that my son would rather pass from this world than that his father should be false to his oath of office, and that you and your fiendish fellow conspirators should escape the clutch of justice and continue on in your murderous course!"

"Fool!" screamed the woman, her eyes again blazing with fanatical fury. "The work will go on and the world of slaves will be set free from their serfdom beneath the heel of capitalistic tyrants. And your son shall die!"

As she hissed out the threat she pointed her right hand at the detective and Sysonby's eyes were dazzled by the flashing rays that leaped from an enormous diamond that graced a ring on her finger. But even while his gaze was bent on the blazing stone he clapped his left hand to his left cheek, while over his face there stole a puzzled expression, and when the woman noted this she bared her teeth in a grin of triumph and snarled:

"I have lied to you, for your son is alive and well and on his way home. But you will never see him, for in two minutes you will be a dead man, and another foe to the progress of freedom for the world——"

While she had been sneering at him and taunting him, queer changes of color and expression had chased in succession over Sysonby's face, and he had trembled as though with an ague. But he suddenly seemed to understand the change that he felt taking place within him. His glazing eyes suddenly flashed with the light of a firm resolution, and he said, hoarsely, and only maintained an erect posture by a great effort of his rapidly waning strength:

"Yes, you have killed me, and I feel that I am going fast, but this shall be your last crime!"

As he uttered the last word he clutched the edge of the desk with his powerful left hand, and the right hand, the enormous fingers fully extended, darted forth to clutch the slender throat of the beautiful, mocking fanatic who regarded him with sneering triumph.

The visitor tried to make a swift backward movement when she saw that great paw with its curved nails advancing towards her, but an enormously heavy chair blocked her movements. A quick intelligence told her that even the fraction of a second of time was important, and when she found that she could not retreat with sufficient celerity to escape that menacing hand she bent her head forward in an effort to dodge the danger. This lowered her face just enough to bring it to where her throat had been, and the steel-like fingers closed about her cheeks, while the long, curved nails pressed in with full force, every atom of Sysonby's strength concentrated in that dying effort.

The woman screamed with pain and pulled violently away from the enormous clutching hand. As the imbedded nails tore

across her cheeks she wrenched her face forcibly from the gradually relaxing grip of the immense hand, groaning with pain as blood dripped from her lacerated cheeks and fell upon the desk. With a backward kick she upset the heavy chair which was holding her against the flat desk, and clapping her handkerchief to her face and shaking with sobs, she turned hastily away just as Sysonby fell to the floor with a great crash. She might have searched his pockets, but footsteps in the hall frightened her and she hurried out of the detective's rooms.

CHAPTER FOUR

"GOOD-EVENING, Eph; hello, Sam," said the tall, clean-shaven man of forty who walked into the hallway of the bachelor apartment-house half an hour later and nodded familiarly to the telephone operator and the ebony-hued product of Kentucky at the door of the elevator.

"How do, sah," came the grinning chorus, and Mark Maitland, who looked much more like a clergyman than one of the keenest operators in the United States Secret Service, smiled back at them.

"Any news?"

"Yessuh, Mistuh Maitland," gurgled Eph, "yo' friend done have a visitor a little while back dis evenin', and I clar to goodness she wuz a peach."

"She wuz a whole basket o' peaches," was Sam's indorsement.

"Oh, a good-looking woman called on my chum and you impressionable descendents of Ham rave about a peach," chaffingly said Maitland, but he was silenced by the colored boys asserting in chorus:

"Dis one wuz peaches an' cream!"

"Well," tolerantly said Maitland, smiling indulgently on the enthusiastic colored boys, "I'll go up and take a look at her, and decide how far you are justified in your opinion."

"She's done gone, suh," said Sam, "and ah guess she had a run in with Mistuh Sysonby, 'cause she wuz holdin' her handkerchief to her face an' cryin' like she wuz really broken-hearted."

"Did she say anything?"

"Sessuh, she said she had bin shamefully treated. She said that moh dan half a dozen times, an' all de time she wuz cryin' like she wuz broken-hearted or else in great pain."

"Well, I'll go up and see what it was all about," said Maitland and stepped into the car, wondering what business could have brought the woman to seek an interview with his partner.

When Maitland left the elevator at the fifth floor and walked along the corridor to the room at the rear, he followed exactly the same course as that pursued by Sysonby less than an hour before, going through the same routine with the keys and pausing to peer sharply into the brilliantly lighted apartment after throwing open the door. Then he stood motionless, for he had expected to see his chum, and he failed to do so, but he did see that one of the heavy chairs had been overturned and lay on its back at one side of the desk. As his practised eyes swept over the floor in the vicinity of the desk, and then traveled slowly towards his feet, he saw that there were crimson drops spotting the snowy tiles, and with a great fear at his heart he entered the room and closed the door. Advancing to the desk, his roving gaze first took note that on the side of it nearest the overturned chair, and close to the edge of the desk, there were several more blood-spots. Then he looked on the other side of the desk and uttered a startled cry as he saw his partner lying on the floor. There was something in the position of the head and the unnatural appearance of the neck that told Maitland his partner was dead. Bending down and fixing his eyes keenly on the face of the dead man, Maitland looked at it long and earnestly. It was evident from the frown on his forehead and the concentrated expression of his face that he was studiously turning over some question in his mind. Then he arose and walked to the telephone booth at the rear of the apartment, where he called a number of the Columbus central, and a moment later a squeaky voice, evidently that of a boy, came to him with the customary

"Hello!"

"Hello!" responded Maitland, and there was an undercurrent of anxiety in his voice as he added, "what place is this?"

"Dr. Harry Wessler's office, and I am the office boy," the voice informed him.

"Good!" cried Maitland. "This is a gentleman who wishes to make an appointment with the doctor."

"Hold the wire."

A moment later a refined and cultivated voice came to the ear of the waiting detective:

"Doctor Wessler speaking."

"Doctor, this is Mr. Maitland of the United States Secret Service. A few weeks ago a member of the Metropolitan detective force gave me your name and your telephone number after he had finished telling me how you had helped him in a poison murder case. He gave me your telephone number, and now I have a murder which even my limited knowledge of such matters assures me is due to poison, and I would like to have your aid in the matter."

"And I assure you that I would leave a banquet to come to you in order to see such a case," was the hearty response. "How recent is the death?"

"Not an hour old."

"Excellent. Where are you, Mr. Maitland?"

The detective gave him the address, and then the doctor said that he was in his office in West Seventieth street, that his analytical valise was lying at his feet, his automobile was at the door, and that he would be with the detective in about twenty minutes. Maitland hung up the receiver and once more looked down on his murdered partner. After a moment's consideration he made a slow and careful search through the pockets of the dead man, and was gratified when he found the notebook in which Sysonby had jotted down the information he had extracted from Orloff that very afternoon. Sitting down at the desk, he carefully read the plainly written lines, and was still engaged in the inspection when the house telephone rang and he at once put away the notebook and picked up the receiver.

"Mistuh Maitland, is yo' expectin'——"

"Doctor Wessler? Yes, Eph. Send him up at once."

Then he opened the door of the apartment and stood in the doorway to greet the dark, studious-looking man of thirty who a moment later strode towards him from the elevator, carrying a square case of considerable size which Maitland instructed him to place on the flat desk.

"Now, doctor," said the detective, closing the door, "if you will look down on the floor at the left of the desk you will see your subject."

The physician obeyed, and a moment later was bending over the still form of the murdered detective, who lay flat on his back, his face turned up to the full glare of the electric light. Long and intently the physician looked down upon his subject, closely scanning the face, retracting the upper eyelids, bending down so as to bring his nose close to the swollen mouth. Finally he seized the arms, bending the forearms at the elbows, then took hold of the feet and bent the legs at the knees.

"Am I right, doctor?" asked Maitland.

"Yes, you are. This man died from an arrow poison. Judging from the puffed and swollen lips, the dark red hue of the face, the intensely black blood now dried on the lips, and which must have been dark when it oozed forth, and adding to that the utter relaxation which has completely delayed the rigor mortis, or death stiffening, I can confidently say that the poison was either the terrible South American woorara or the equally frightful African carrovalia. Either one kills its victim with astonishing rapidity."

"Very well," said Maitland, "and now, doctor, please note the fact that on the other side of this desk there are some drops of blood, and also drops of blood on the white floor, leading all the way to the door. Carefully inspect all these drops and tell me, if you can, if the drops on the desk are older than the ones on the floor, and anything else that may be of value."

The doctor got upon his feet, opened his big, square case, and took out some glass

slides, a microscope and a portable laboratory test set which he placed on the desk.

Methodically, and with observance of every detail of technique, the physician went about his task, using a hand magnifying-glass to inspect the bloodspots on the desk, and then later on those which impaired the integrity of the scrupulously scoured white tiles. He touched many of them with an extremely thin spatula in a delicate way, and took three smears from different locations on his polished glass slides. Then he had recourse to his condensed laboratory outfit, and with the use of various reagents and his microscope occupied himself for several minutes, while the detective stood looking on. Finally the doctor turned to Maitland and said:

"The bloodspots are very nearly of one age, but those on the floor are slightly older than those on the desk. They lead to the conclusion that the dripping was begun at the desk and continued across the floor to the door. My tests prove that it is the blood of one that suckles its young. Taken together with this murder, it warrants the assumption that it is the blood of a human being."

"But I can settle that question, doctor," promptly said the detective, "because the protective system that guards the tenants in this house furnished me with the information as soon as I came in. Let me explain.

"This building is occupied exclusively by detectives connected with either the municipal or the national police. It would be very unpleasant for us to be at the mercy of those with whom we are constantly at war. Such a condition would prevail if the denizens of the underworld could effect access to these apartments when we were absent, and meet us with pointed pistol, long knife or syringe filled with vitriolic acid when we opened our doors, the double locks of which would not delay them very long. So, to guard against surprise, the two colored boys in the corridor have been selected for their shrewdness and their pluck, and as they are armed and know that they have the city and government police at their back they are rigid in carrying out their instructions. When you came in you were met by these boys and know as well as I do just exactly what they are."

"Yes," said the doctor. "I had to state whom I wanted to see, give my name to the telephone operator, and then wait until he had phoned up to you and found out that it was all right."

"That system," said Maitland, "gave me the information as soon as I walked into the main corridor tonight that Sysonby, my partner, had been visited shortly before by a very beautiful woman. She obtained an audience by sending up a message that she had news for him concerning his mysteriously missing son. When she came down on the elevator she was holding her handkerchief to her face, sobbing either from pain or else from a broken-hearted feeling, and it occurred to the colored boys that she must have had a run-in with Sysonby and some important request denied. She was sobbing out that she had been shamefully treated. Taking all this in connection with what you have established, it is safe to assume that the woman committed this crime. Now what next?"

"The next thing to establish is how the arrow poison was introduced into your partner's body," said the doctor. "The prick of a pin held in the hand of one who grasped his intended victim has more than once sufficed to do the trick. The action of the poison is so intensely rapid that there is never any chance of escape from death. Before we strip the body in order to inspect it for the most minute puncture, I will have a look at the face and neck."

Bending over the dead man, he again employed his hand glass, and painstakingly examined every half inch of the throat, and then turned his inspection to the face. A moment later he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction, and called the attention of the watching detective to a slightly elevated portion of the left cheek, and which, to Maitland, looked like a moderate sized pimple.

"In my open surgical pocket case you will see a pair of needle-pointed forceps, and near them some small envelopes. Please hand me the forceps and one envelope, and be sure not to drop either," requested the doctor. "I must not move."

With exceeding care the detective lifted the required articles and handed them over. Then the doctor carefully inserted the needle points into the flesh over the minute swelling and drew forth something which he held up for Maitland's inspection. The latter saw what appeared to be part of a needle about a quarter of an inch long, the sharp end of which was covered with some dark substance. In his eagerness the detective stretched forth his hand to take it, his professional instinct prompting him to examine it, but the doctor hastily moved his hand aside and shouted:

"Stop! The slightest prick from that point means death. If in handling it the poison on it came in contact with the least abrasion on your hands you would be a dead man. Hold the envelope open for me and I will drop it in and seal it up. When I withdraw it for analysis it will be done with forceps, and even then with the greatest of care, and the forceps will be thoroughly disinfected immediately after. Now, I will drop these forceps into a bottle of disinfecting solution, and then we will continue our examination of this dead man and find out what we may."

CHAPTER FIVE

A MOMENT later the doctor was holding one of the limp hands in his and looking with a puzzled expression at the fingers.

"Say, Mr. Maitland," he finally said, "do you think it is possible that your partner was cleaning up this room just before this mysterious woman assassin made her call?"

"The rooms are cleaned daily in the most thorough manner by the maids," said the surprised detective, "but why do you ask such a strange question as that, doctor?"

"Well, it looks to me as though he had cobwebs on his hands," was the astonishing reply of the medical man, "and it occurred to me that he might be one of those fastidious men who cannot tolerate cobwebs in a sleeping room, and that having discovered some, he had torn them away with his right hand. Look well at the tips of his fingers and see whether I am right or wrong."

Down went Maitland on his hands and knees, and looked keenly at his late partner's right hand as the physician held it up to view.

"Yes," he decided, "that stuff clinging to his nails certainly does look like a bunch of cobwebs that he had torn away from some place. I tell you again that such a going over as the maids give these rooms every day would make it impossible for such an amount to collect in any corner or behind any picture or article of furniture between the time of the morning cleaning and the early part of the evening when Sysonby entered here."

"Nevertheless we are agreed that the cobwebs are at the present moment clinging to his nails," said the doctor, "and for all we know your late partner may have left the room for some purpose, and gone to——"

He had been staring intently at the upheld hand while talking to the deeply puzzled detective, and had raised the enormous member closer to his eyes. The nearer view had flashed a new idea into his brain and brought his discourse to an abrupt halt. Nearer still he brought the great hand to his eyes, looked intently at the fingers, and then turned to Maitland and said:

"At the left side of that box, and in the far corner of it, you will see a large flashlight held by metal clips. It is true your room is well lighted, but when it is desirable to concentrate light on a small object the flashlight is the thing."

Silently the detective secured the flashlight and handed it over to the doctor, who took it with his left hand, worked the sliding cutout with his thumb, and turned the powerfully magnified light on the finger-tips of the dead man. Again he regarded them with a long and careful scrutiny.

"The idea that flashed into my mind proves to be correct," he announced to his companion, "and what we both took to be cobwebs proves to be what may be designated cobwebby lace, the very finest, probably, that the most delicate worker ever spun. Look well at it, and be convinced that I am right."

Down went Maitland on his hands and knees again, and he closely inspected the marvel revealed by the condensed rays of the flashlight. An exclamation of astonishment broke from his lips.

"Yes, it really is fine lace," he said, "and the light shows that it is strangely discolored in two different tints of red."

"That is right," said the doctor, "and as I have a pretty complete analytical outfit with me, and this case intrigues me to an extent that will unfit me for my routine work for some hours, at least, I am going to scrape under these nails and subject the scrapings to such tests as may afford us some clue to the person who committed this crime."

"Good!" cried Maitland. "I've got a supply of excellent cigars. Later on, if you desire a little snack, it can be ordered from the kitchen below."

The doctor took a section of white paper and a nail-file from his case and carefully scraped beneath the nails of the right hand of the murdered detective, depositing the scrapings on the paper, which he laid on the desk at the side of the valise. Then he bent over the scrapings to once more view the wonderful face at close range, and immediately straightened up. Again he bent over the scrapings and sniffed so strongly at them that little sections arose from the pile and fluttered beneath his nose. Three times he sniffed at the little mound of scrapings, and then an expression of enlightenment flashed over his dark, intelligent face, and he fairly shouted:

"Cream of the Orient!"

He saw Maitland regarding him with wondering eyes, and hastened to explain the cause of his outburst.

"Listen," he said, "and your recognition of the importance of the clue will lead you to pardon my shouting. I have long been in attendance on a lady who comes to my office for treatment of a slight cardiac trouble, in which particular field some persons are kind enough to regard me as an expert. Every time I go over this patient's heart with the stethoscope, I detect the peculiar perfume which I at this moment found arising from the scrapings. Now it happens that this particular odor is peculiarly grateful to my sense of smell; so much so, indeed, that I have been unable to resist the temptation to sniff strongly at it in order to obtain it in the fullest possible degree. I have often been impelled to beg the lady's pardon for what might appear an offensive act, but she has merely laughed at the matter.

"This lady, who is a handsome brunette, informed me that the delicious odor arises from a cosmetic made in Teheran, Persia. It is scented with a perfume of that country. It was brought to her notice by the Persian proprietor of a beauty-parlor which this lady patronizes, and my patient learned that this particular cream rendered the skins of brunettes softer, clearer and more delicate in bloom than any other in the world. It also possessed a preservative quality that could not be claimed by any other similar production. Although the price demanded for it was excessive, it was not beyond the purse of my wealthy patient, who has been using it constantly. Now comes the important point so far as the cream may be considered in relation to this crime. I learned from this lady that but three customers constantly purchased this particular cosmetic—my patient, a well-known society leader and a darkly beautiful woman who is believed by the proprietor of the beauty-parlor to be a screen actress. I cannot be in error about the perfume, and the knowledge that I have turned over to you narrows the field down to the supposed screen actress. My patient and the society leader may be dismissed from consideration, although you might look up the record of the latter on the possibility that she might be one of these parlor Bolshevists. With her eliminated, the supposed screen actress would be the only one left for you to investigate. With the address of the beauty-parlor in your possession, and with the possibilities of surveillance and shadowing at your command, it should not be difficult for you to locate the dark woman, and when you find her I think you will have found the person who committed this crime."

"Great!" cried Maitland, his eyes glittering. "And, doctor, I must say that you are something of a detective yourself. What you

have already shown me, and what may develop from your hypothesis, will help wonderfully. Now, before you begin your analysis of that heap of cobwebby lace, I want to ask if you have formed any theory as to the manner in which that poisoned dart was introduced into the flesh of my partner. I confess that I am puzzled to imagine how that was done. What do you think?"

"Probably blown with an air-gun, as there are no powder marks. And now," said the physician, "I'm going to buckle down to this analysis, and to aid thinking I'm going to smoke a cigar."

He lit the Havana that the detective handed over to him, arranged his working outfit on the desk, and then picked up a piece of the delicate lace and held it between a forefinger and thumb.

"It carries a gummy substance," he announced, and then placed the lace on a small porcelain dish and reached for some bottles and some pinchcocks, with which he busied himself for a few minutes, and then turned to the waiting detective and announced:

"It is either arabic or tragicanth gum."

"Is the difference important?" asked Maitland.

"No. The importance lies in the fact that it is either one of these gums, and it was used for some adhesive purpose. Now we have two red stains on the lace, and one is a light tint and the other is a deep tint. I'll tackle the light red tint first, and try to decide what that is."

There was a deep, suspenseful silence.

"It is merely a coloring matter, a pinkish dye," the doctor announced a moment later to the detective, "and may safely be put down as the ingredient that gives the exquisite bloom to the cheeks of those who use it. Now for the other red tint, the dark-red one."

Again he busied himself with his dishes, his pinchcocks and his bottles of reagents, stopping frequently to take long, reflective pulls at the cigar. After another delay he placed a minute smear of the dark-red matter on a glass slide, moistened it, and then placed the slide under the object piece of his powerful microscope and studied it earnestly, Maitland hanging over him like an inquiring shadow.

"It is human blood," finally announced the doctor, taking another pull at the cigar, "and I venture to give the opinion, prompted by several features of the specimen, that it is comparatively fresh blood, probably not more than one or two hours old. Now I will place some of these sections of lace in an envelope for you, and when you place them beneath the nose of the proprietor of the beauty-parlor, he will take one sniff and immediately assure you that it comes from his rare Persian perfume that so deliciously scents the cosmetic called Cream of the Orient. At the same time you may learn something of value about this alleged screen actress. I will take the rest of the specimens along with me for a confirmatory analysis tomorrow, and will report to you when I've gone over them again. That, I think, is all for now, unless anything occurs wherein I may aid you."

"No, doctor," said Maitland, "there is nothing more at the present time, and I not only want to thank you for your wonderful work, but also to say to you that your discoveries enable me to form a theory."

"One that may lead to the conviction of the guilty person?"

"Yes."

"Thanks," smilingly said the physician as he carefully repacked everything in the large analytical case, locked it and prepared to depart. "I feel quite big and important, and in such a happy frame of mind that I know I shall sleep well and have pleasant dreams."

He shook hands with the detective and took his departure. Maitland sat down with the dead detective's notebook in his hand to once more scan the entries his late partner had made and to ponder over the many strange features that Doctor Wessler's investigation had brought to light. Then, having decided on a course of action, which would begin the following day, he went to the telephone booth and called up the officers whom it was necessary to inform of the crime, and sat down with a fresh cigar to await their coming.

CHAPTER SIX

THE next morning Maitland sent a long message in code to Paris. Then he made a call on the proprietor of the beauty-shop whose address had been given to him by Doctor Wessler. He had an interview with that person, which resulted in placing two of his most experienced assistants on the opposite side of the street from the parlor. Then he made a trip to No. 13 Park Row and had a lengthy conversation with the local head of the Service, in which the well-filled notebook he had taken from the pocket of his murdered partner figured to an important extent. A few hours later a long cable message from Europe in code came, which he carried to his room and with the aid of a code-book was able to reduce the message to plain English. The result apparently afforded the detective an immense degree of satisfaction.

"It is all working out nicely," muttered Maitland, again reading over the decoded cable message, "and it seems to be assured that I shall have the melancholy pleasure of avenging Sysonby's awful death!"

Two mornings later his operatives, who had been on duty across the way from the beauty-parlor, made their report to him. In the afternoon the tall detective, clothed in black and wearing a pair of blue spectacles which, united to his thin, studious face, gave him a professional aspect, left his room.

Going to a certain lodging-house he asked for a room and was shown one.

"This will suit me to perfection," he said, after one comprehensive glance over the room, "and if my nearby lodgers are desirable persons—that is, persons who do not come in noisily in the small hours—I shall take it. Who are my neighboring lodgers?"

"Well," said the landlady, "I am sure that you will not object to them, for the lodger at the rear is an old gentleman who always goes to bed at nine every night. The other nearest one, occupying the room just beneath this, is a lady who is supposed to be an actress, and she can be heard softly studying her part any afternoon or evening."

"Nothing disturbing about that," graciously commented the prospective lodger, as he drew forth a plump-looking billfold, which was regarded approvingly by the landlady, "and although I am staid and studious, I must confess to an interest in these stars of the stage. Is she one of the stage beauties?"

"That's what many of the gentlemen in the house would like to know," responded the gossiping landlady; "but although several have met her on the stairs or in the hallways, and agree that she is beautifully formed, not one of them has seen her face because she always wears a heavy veil. But, then——"

"Mrs. Nicholson!" broke in a voice from the lower hallway at this moment, and the landlady frowned with displeasure as she told the visitor that her maid was calling and to please await her return, which would be within a minute or two. The gentleman politely assented. Then the woman ran down the stairs, calling to the maid as she went. After she had descended the first flight from the top the detective softly crept after her and paused midway on the stairway to look keenly through the clear glass of the transom over the door of the second floor front room. He nodded his head approvingly as he noted the furnishings of the apartment, and his gaze rested longest on the mirror of the large dressing-case which stood between the two front windows. It was flanked on either side with adjustable electric lights. The room was unoccupied. Silently the detective crept up the stairs again and was looking out of the window when the landlady reappeared.

"Well, Mrs. Nicholson, I am favorably impressed in every way with this room, and will pay you a week in advance. My trunk will arrive this afternoon at the Grand Central Station. I will claim and express it to you."

And away went Professor Mason. But he got no further than the corner nearest to the lodging-house.

Here he was promptly joined by his two clever assistants, who had previously been placed on guard outside the beauty-parlor, and after a short talk with the pair he strolled downtown, puffing reflectively at the briar pipe he had filled and lighted

while talking to his aides. Although he seemed sunk in a reverie, his observant eyes took in everything going on around him. Happening to flash a glance over the faces of some furtive-eyed men who were slouching along with lowered heads, he sent the sly ones scuttling down the side streets in a hurry. It brought a sarcastic grin to Maitland's face, from which the blue spectacles had been removed when he left the lodging-house. He turned into Sixth avenue and halted before a small shop in which watches and clocks were displayed, and also the mechanical parts of those devices which move fans, cause electric lights to change colors and various other mechanisms which require a high degree of technical skill. On the window of this small store was painted these words:

LEWIS FISH
Tool-Maker and Expert in Mechanical Devices

The detective grinned approvingly as he looked at the wording on the not over-clean window, and after a glance through the grimy panes he turned the handle and pushed open the door, causing a loud jangling from an overhead bell which vibrated on a spring. The small shop was empty, as the detective had made out by peering through the window. He did not even glance through the space that separated him from the partition that created a room at the rear, but bent over and seemingly was studying the mechanism of a peculiar clockwork that was exposed to view on the counter. He knew that he was being inspected through a peephole in the partition and therefore did not raise his head from the close study he was apparently bestowing on the mechanism before him. Fully two minutes passed, and Maitland did not move a muscle. Then the door of the partition was thrown open and a middle-aged man, wearing a long, soiled apron and carrying in one hand what looked like part of an electric motor and in the other a gleaming tool, came hurriedly into the shop and moved up behind the counter and opposite the detective.

"You must excuse me for keeping you waiting, sir," he said, "but I was just finishing this part and could not put it out of my hand without spoiling the work of half an hour. What can I do for you?"

"You can make me a clock-work bomb exploder, the same design as you constructed five years ago for Nordoff. It was used to blow up the home of a United States Secret Service man. Fortunately for the intended victim, owing to a slight error, it went off an hour ahead of time and very nearly blew Nordoff into atoms!" was the startling reply, and the detective grinned maliciously at the man behind the counter as the latter started back with jaws agape and protruding eyes. The proprietor of the little shop looked aggrieved as he mournfully shook his head.

"You are making a mistake, sir," he said, "for while I am skillful enough to construct anything of a mechanical character, my conscience would not permit me to make an infernal machine, no matter how much money I was——"

"That will do for you, Louis Poisson," sharply interrupted Maitland, and then as the other recoiled he added, "the next time you desire to Anglicize your name don't select such a literal translation. My assistants were hunting for you, and your sign on the window told them that you were here, although their knowledge of French is limited to what they have picked up from menu cards."

"Gee!" disgustedly said the other.

"Anything that pleases you, Louis," sweetly said the detective, "and by this time it has probably dawned upon you that while I do not want any sort of machine, I know what I am talking about when I say that you built the one that very nearly finished Nordoff. I am the one who found him groaning and bleeding on the sidewalk and had him conveyed to a hospital. With the idea that I might get a good return on the investment, I obtained a private room for him, paid for night and day nursing, and saw that he was made comfortable in every way. It did pay, too, for I was his only visitor during his stay in the hospital, and helped to while away many weary hours. As he felt grateful to me and furious with you for

your error, it was quite natural on his part to tell me the whole case under promise of immunity."

"It's a lie!" screamed the other. "This is all a bluff on your part, and you can't scare me one bit. I don't know what you are talking about. I don't know the man you name."

"He knows you, and as he is secure under promise of immunity he will identify you in court if need be. I've got you sewed up tight, Louis, and can send you to a Federal jail for ten years if you don't come to terms with me."

"Who are you?" demanded Louis in a truculent tone.

"Who I am doesn't matter," smoothly responded the detective, "but what I am is of great importance."

And with that Maitland drew forth his right suspender and showed his gleaming badge of office. When Louis recognized what it was he paled and shivered as though he had encountered a cold blast. All his assurance forsook him at once. Long and earnestly he looked at the detective and the latter met his gaze with the masterful expression that is seen in the eyes of a tamer of wild beasts when he seeks to subdue a denizen of the forest. There is something in the eyes of an experienced detective that strikes terror to the very soul of the most hardened criminals, and after a moment the eyes of the craftsman behind the counter fell and he whispered:

"What do you want?"

"Now you're talking sense," answered the detective. "I'll tell you what I want, and either you'll give me the information I seek or I'll take you along and put an end to your criminal activities for ten years. Lock the door so we will not be interrupted, and in five minutes I'll be out of here and you will be safe."

Hardly more than five minutes later Maitland left the little shop with some information he wanted, and in a very contented frame of mind strolled in a leisurely way downtown until he reached Doyers street. There he entered a shop on the window of which was painted something in the Chinese language which the detective knew asserted that the place was devoted to the sale of drugs and chemicals. Behind the counter stood a wrinkled Chinaman, who looked up as Maitland entered and nodded a greeting.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"DOCTOR SHANTUNG?" asked Maitland.

"That is what they call me," was the response in perfect English, "but as a matter of fact I am not a physician, but a chemist. What can I do for you?"

"Well, it's not for me exactly, but for my chum Jim Brady, who says you know him well because he has been dealing with you for five years. Remember him?"

"Yes, I remember Jim Brady."

"Well, Doc, Jim is in a bad way, and dare not leave the house, so he sent me to get a deck of snow, and he says this is the right amount."

And with the concluding words the detective threw a banknote on the counter, and the Chinaman's beady eyes sparkled, but he was cautious enough to subject his customer to a long scrutiny. Finally he said:

"I can't understand this. Jim had enough to last him a week, and it was only three days ago that he was here."

"That's what Jim said would puzzle you," promptly agreed Maitland, "but he was fool enough to give some of his stock to Windy Muller, who was all out of it and broke, and raving like a bug, and now Jim is nearly as bad himself."

"I can understand that," said Shantung, "because Miller should have been in two days ago himself, and it occurred to me that he was down and out. Well, here is the stuff."

He handed over a small envelope to Maitland, who opened it, disclosing neatly folded papers within, one of which the detective extracted, unfolded it, and very carefully touched the extreme tip of his tongue to the white powder disclosed to his view.

"The real stuff!" he announced.

"Of course it is the real stuff," asserted

the Chinaman, as though offended by his customer's remark. "I am known to be reliable, and, while I charge the proper price, I deliver the real goods without adulteration."

"So I understand," observed Maitland, and refolding the paper he replaced it in the envelope, carefully sealed it and then produced a fountain pen and wrote something on the envelope, Shantung watching him inquiringly.

Maitland stowed the sealed envelope away in an inner pocket and then stood idly gazing at the ceiling; but this bit of acting did not deceive the accomplished oriental, who was watching him, and although his yellow face was like a mask there was unconcealable interest in his voice as he asked:

"May I inquire what you marked on that envelope which might interest your chum Jim Brady?"

"Oh, what I have written there will never interest Jim Brady, for the excellent reason that he will never see it," responded Maitland, and as he spoke he drew from the same pocket in which he had placed the sealed envelope a short, blue-barreled revolver, which he held lightly in his hand and down at one side as he faced the Chinaman. "I will inform you that I wrote the day and date on that envelope before sealing it, and also the fact that the contents were purchased of you and alleged to be cocaine. The contents will never be exposed to view unless I have to ask a United States District Attorney to break the seal in court and hand over the contents to a government chemist for analysis, and in that event, my dear doctor, you would find yourself in a very bad hole. Do you recognize this?"

And, shifting the pistol from one hand to the other, the detective once more flashed his glittering badge of office before the eyes of a lawbreaker. The Chinaman nodded his head.

"You fooled me," he said. "I took you for some sort of literary man who had to use something to keep going. Well, is this a pinch?"

"Not unless you make it necessary."

"I am beginning to see a great light," said the accomplished oriental. "What do you want?"

"Just a little information, something that can do you no possible harm, but will do me a great deal of good. You may as well understand from the beginning that it will be a waste of time to lie to me, for I am on assured ground and am positive that you can give me what I want. Either you will do so, or I will march you out of here with my gun pressed against your back and take you down to Park Row."

"You talk plain," said the Chinaman, "and unless what you want of me would put me in a worse position than an arrest, why, I feel sure that you are going to get the information you want."

"That is sensible talk," rejoined the detective, "and before I make my demand I want to remind you that after you have given me what I want, you will be regarded as aiding the government and entitled to all the protection that can be extended in relation to anything that might threaten you resulting from your disclosures. You are clever enough to realize the value of such protection. Now lock the door to insure against any chance of interruption, and then I'll talk, holding my gun in my hand. To let you see for yourself that even triumphant treachery on your part would avail you nothing, I'll request you to look toward the corners of the street and note how interested two heavily built men are in the aspect of the sky."

Five minutes thereafter Maitland left the Chinaman's drug den and strolled in a seemingly jubilant mood uptown to Park Row, where he turned in at the door of number thirteen, and had a long talk with the Chief of the local division of the ever-watchful United States Secret Service.

"Great work, Maitland," said the Chief, "and now that you have got the final link of the chain, when will you make the collar?"

"Perhaps tonight; anyhow, the first night that I get the signal and, also, when the lady goes through the expected performance."

Two days passed by, and in the early evening Maitland sat near the window of

his room on the third floor front of the Nicholson establishment, and the sole gleam of light in the apartment came from the glowing tip of the cigar he was smoking. One ear inclined attentively toward the open window, through which came the gentle spring breeze. His cigar was about half consumed when the melody of a sweetly played flute came floating up from the street below, playing the French national anthem.

"The Marsellaise!" cried Maitland, and getting up from his chair he leaned over the window-sill and stood there until light flashed from the window below.

A moment later another electric light flashed up in the room beneath him. Maitland left his room and softly tiptoed halfway down the stairway to the next floor, and there he halted in the gloom and looked through the polished glass of the transom into the brilliantly lighted room. Standing before the mirror of the dressing-case was a superbly formed woman, and after regarding her for a moment the detective took a small but powerful pair of opera-glasses from a pocket and trained them on the reflection of the woman's face as she stared at her reflected image.

The result of bringing the face within focus was so startling that Maitland nearly dropped the glasses, for he gazed upon a countenance so deeply pitted with the ravages of smallpox, so indented and scarred and distorted with the action of confluent pustules, that the result was repulsive.

Steadily he trained the glasses upon the woman in front of the mirror and saw her unlock a drawer and take from it a saucer which at that distance was evidently filled with cobwebs.

"The cobwebby lace," softly muttered Maitland. "The lace we found under poor Sysonby's nails."

The saucer was placed on one side, and then from the drawer came two bottles and a long, slender pair of forceps.

Drawing forth the cork of one bottle, the woman disclosed the fact that a brush was attached to it, and this brush she gently applied to one of the deepest furrows of the cheek that was turned toward the detective. Then the brush was replaced in the bottle and with the long forceps the woman took up a section of the cobwebby lace and applied it to the place where she had a moment previously applied the brush. When she lowered the forceps the filmy bit of lace remained on her cheek.

"I've seen enough," said the detective.

Putting the glasses away, he ran lightly up the stairs into his room, and as he approached the open window he took something from his vest pocket and cast it into the street. A few seconds later a loud report was heard. He stood with one ear inclined toward the open window until two similar reports floated up from the street in quick succession. Then he turned on his heel and made for the stairs again. As he began to descend the flight the street door was opened and footsteps were heard ascending the lower flight. Maitland walked swiftly to the head of the second flight of stairs and there stood until two men came running noiselessly over the pads. At the top of the flight he halted the men and beckoned them into the corner.

"Now listen attentively to what I say," he whispered, "for this is serious business. There is the door of her room, and we are going to break it in and take her by surprise. Although she is a woman, no criminal is capable of dealing such sure and sudden death in an emergency, and she will not hesitate a moment to kill if she has the chance. When we dash down the door we will all three leap in and rush at her. The element of surprise will give you two the opportunity to run to her and seize her hands. You, Brown, go for the right hand, and you, King, make for the left. When you get them, bring the two hands behind her back and hold them there until I can clap on the bracelets. But, as you value your lives, do not get in front of her, or you may meet with sudden and inevitable death. Hang on with all your strength and weight until I give the word to let go. Is it all clear?"

"Yes," unitedly whispered the two aides.

"Then come with me," ordered Maitland. "We will all put our shoulders against the door, and when I give the word, shove it in with all your force and weight."

Placing themselves opposite the door of the woman's room, and as far from it as the handrail permitted, they leaned back until Maitland sharply hissed:

"Now!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

UNITEDLY the three officers threw themselves with full force against the door. The lock broke with a loud snap and the door flew wide open. Through the opening the men darted, Maitland's aides rushing to the right and to the left of the woman as they had been instructed. Before the astonished occupant could realize what was happening they had seized her wrists and brought her arms down at full length behind her back.

"What is the meaning——"

So far the woman got in what was probably meant to be an indignant protest against this conduct, but at that moment Maitland slipped behind her back and with accomplished fingers stripped away the magnificent diamond ring she wore on the forefinger of her right hand. The act so astonished her that for a moment she was dumb with surprise, but, recovering her mental balance, she began to scream. Before she had emitted more than one cry Maitland stepped back a couple of paces and pointed his forefinger, which was now adorned with her ring, straight at the woman's face. If he had clapped his hand over her mouth the effect could not have been more instantaneous. She promptly closed her lips and an apprehensive shiver ran over her body.

"Don't like to have it pointed at you, do you, Dora Vassiloff?" the detective asked.

For answer she began to pour out a torrent of foul-mouthed cursing and glared furiously at Maitland. Something in her expression gave the detective an idea.

"Perhaps you are sneering because you think I don't know how to operate the mechanism of your ring," he said, "but I'll speedily correct that impression. This is the way to do it."

He placed his thumb at the side of his forefinger and moved it slowly along toward the outer side of the great diamond.

"No, no! Stop!" she moaned.

Maitland grinned at her triumphantly and lowered his hand. Then he turned to the dressing-case and picked up the two bottles that stood there, and to each of his aides he presented one, and to Brown he handed his fountain pen with the cap removed and said:

"I want you and King to write your initials on the labels of those two bottles, and also on this envelope which contains these fragments of fine lace. I will add my initials when you are through. That's the way."

He initialed the bottles and the envelope after his aides, and then partly sealed the envelope, drove the stoppers firmly down into the necks of the bottles, and in a separate piece of paper wrapped up the slender forceps that the woman had used. All four objects were placed carefully in the capacious pockets of his shockingly unfashionable coat. Then he motioned to his aides to seat the woman while he made a decidedly thorough inventory of the dressing-case drawers, finding a number of letters which he glanced at with evident satisfaction. He placed them securely in an inside pocket, the prisoner looking on with wrathfully blazing eyes. The detective next went down on his hands and knees and crawled over the carpet with outstretched hands and delicately groping fingers, seeking for the slightest inequality or elevation which might suggest a hiding place. He ended up by loosening the corners by main strength and turning the fabric back. In one corner he was rewarded by finding two cards on which addresses were written. These he put in his pocket, and then he examined the bed, the bedstead, the washstand, the chairs, a lounge, and finally made a minute inspection of the baseboards that ran all around the room. Maitland finished his search with a slow and thorough examination of the pictures that hung on the wall. Finally he turned to his waiting aides and announced:

"I guess we've got everything possible, so we'll move along and pay our visit to Miss Stewart. Up with her, boys, and if

she makes any trouble for you about the matter of walking, you can carry her."

The aides pulled the prisoner to her feet, and although she assumed a well-simulated expression of outraged dignity, she made no physical protest, but in silence descended the stairs with the men clutching her arms. She did not even raise her eyes when the scandalized landlady caught sight of her at the bottom of the last flight and threw up her hands with a gasp of wordless surprise. The prisoner was hurried out of the house and onto the sidewalk, and an instant later a closed automobile, which had been waiting a few doors away, drove up as Maitland raised his hand. The four entered and were at once driven away. The machine ran but a half-mile and then pulled up in a semi-fashionable locality where a faint night-light burning in a first-story window enabled one to make out this announcement lettered on the glass:

CATHERINE STEWART
Parisian Facial Expert

Up the steps and into the door of the big parlor the prisoner was urged. A bright light was made by a woman who was waiting there in the gloom. She looked with professional interest at the defiant creature who was none too gently placed in a chair by the men who brought her in.

"Now, Miss Stewart," briskly said Maitland, taking the bottles, the envelope and the forceps from his pocket, "you are no doubt thoroughly familiar with all of these adjuncts of female beauty, and as this lady has had the misfortune to have her complexion impaired, I have recommended her to your skillful hands. Do you recognize the contents of the larger bottle?"

Without withdrawing the stopper Miss Stewart raised it to her nose and took one long and enlightening sniff.

"It is the rare and high-priced Cream of the Orient, the very finest liquid rouge for brunette complexions," she announced.

"Good!" said Maitland, and handing her his fountain pen he requested her to initial the bottle before proceeding. Then the facial artist went to work on the prisoner's face with the outfit, working with deft, delicate and experienced hands.

In a short time the prisoner's face assumed the look and tint that nature meant it to have, and then came the drive to headquarters.

After reaching headquarters, the detectives and their prisoner went directly to the Chief's private office, where Dora Vassiloff was immediately and positively identified by the colored elevator and hall boys as having been the person taken to Sysonby's apartment on the night of his murder. They further testified that the prisoner left the apartment and was carried downstairs in the elevator and went out with a handkerchief covering her face and tears in her eyes. Identification being completed, the colored boys were sent out of the room. Dora was next put through as rigid a third degree as ever a prisoner had been forced to undergo. When this failed to break her wonderful nerve, the Chief proceeded along different lines. He then addressed Dora in a tone that could not be misunderstood, spoke slowly and sternly and left no doubt in the minds of those present that he meant business. Facing Dora, he stated bluntly:

"You will give us the names of all those connected with your organization, most of whom we already know, and escape with a term of imprisonment, or you will go to the electric chair as sure as there is a God. There is not one missing link in the chain of evidence that surrounds you. You are shrewd and resourceful, I will admit, but you can't beat the United States Secret Service. Follow me closely, for I will recite the facts that we intend to lay before the jury that tries you.

"First, you will be identified beyond the shadow of a doubt as the person who called upon Sysonby just previous to his murder. A physician of unquestionable reputation will testify that death was caused by a poison known as Carrovalia. He will further testify that he found shreds of a web-like lace underneath the nails of the murdered man. This web-like lace was stained with a spot of human blood and scented with a rare perfumed rouge known as Cream of the Orient; the lace also shows unmistakable

signs of an oriental gum. The physician examined the body before it grew cold.

"Next, we will have the owner of a beauty-parlor state that this cream was sold to you at certain stated intervals. We will then show how you were trailed to your rooms when coming from this beauty-parlor, and how when arrested you were in the very act of actually covering the scars of your face with this web-like lace and the cream. In fact, we will prove that pieces of the lace were in your fingers when we arrested you. We will next show this ring with its devilish device and illustrate for the benefit of the jury how, by moving the stone with the thumb, a spring will release a small steel dart, the size of a needle-point, that will have force enough behind it to penetrate the skin at a distance of about five or six feet. We will show these darts taken from that ring, the very ring that Maitland took from your finger, the top of each dart being covered with this poisonous Carrovalia and similar to the one extracted from the face of the murdered man by the doctor who examined the body.

"We will then have Louis Poisson, known as Lewis Fish, an expert in the art of mechanical devices, who made the ring for you, explain the working of the ring and show that it was capable of holding six poison darts in a miniature magazine, each one being brought into proper position for discharge by the simple process of turning the stone at the top of the ring with a reverse motion. The expulsive force which sends the dart through an opening, we have learned, is the energy of a tiny coiled spring no bigger than the hairspring of an ordinary watch, but tempered by secret methods of Poisson's which gave it the required propelling energy.

"This ring was designed and made especially for you at the cost of one thousand dollars. Poisson will testify to this in order to secure immunity for certain other known deeds. We can send him up on what evidence we have against him, but we are not after the small fry in this instance. The same holds good about the Chinaman, Doctor Shantung, who has long since been suspected of peddling dope to the denizens of the underworld. My men arrested two of his regular 'snow' customers, one a broken-down 'dip' and the other a cracked-brain socialist exhorter whose rambling incoherencies had earned him the name of 'Windy Muller.' On a short affiidavit and a request for time to investigate their cases, they were held in jail for two weeks and pumped dry.

"My men had spotted their visits to Doctor Shantung so well that they could give me the days of the week when either one called on the Chinaman for his supply of cocaine. This knowledge enabled us to work a trick on the doctor and make him believe that Jim Brady, the former 'dip,' had sent for a supply.

"When Maitland paid him for the cocaine and marked the envelope for identification, he let Shantung know who he was and what he wanted, with the result that the Chinaman admitted selling the Carrovalia to you—Dora Vassiloff.

"Doctor Shantung will testify to this, close his business and receive immunity, or he will be sent up as an unlawful dealer in narcotics and drugs. Do you think that any jury would bring in a verdict of anything other than guilty with this evidence before them? Come, now, you have your choice, and must make a quick decision, as we will not bicker with you. Give us the names that we desire and face a charge of second degree murder, or withhold these names and face the electric chair. Which will it be?"

Dora, defiant to the last, realized that the cards were stacked against her, and with the thought of a pardon running through her clever brain she instantly made her decision. She gave the Chief the desired information. The arrest of the leaders of a notorious gang was soon accomplished. Some went up for a long stretch, the balance were turned over to agents of their governments and were deported and dealt with accordingly. No one escaped.

Dora, who had been the foremost advocate of Direct Action, pleaded guilty to a charge of murder in the second degree and received the maximum sentence, and thus was Direct Action used against its chief exponent, while Detective Sysonby, who had not lived in vain, was avenged.

Through the Keyhole

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

CHAPTER ONE

DE SANCTIS, with his dark, foreign face, a secret smile perpetually edging the thin lips, mounted the long stairway to where, on the second floor, was the solitary lodging of his friend and associate, Gammage.

In the time that was past, these two, Gammage—the recluse and, sometimes whispered, the miser—De Sanctis, the broken-down actor, had been something more than associates, friends. There had been a sinister implication in it, and more than this, for there was a dark and hideous secret which they shared in common, or, rather, a secret of Gammage's which the actor had chanced upon, and the secret had been a matter of murder, foul and dark, which the recluse held locked within his breast from all save the cadaverous, dark fellow with the secret smile.

De Sanctis, in his way a genius, had in his time played many parts until, through his one besetting sin of a weakness for strong drink, he had come down to where he was, a fifth-rate actor, but with a marvelous talent for make-up. And not merely that. Playing a character, he *was* that character, to the life.

Gammage, on the surface a queer eccentric, lived alone. He knew no one; he spoke to nobody. The actor was his only friend.

It was late, hard upon midnight. The stairway, a black well of whispering dark, hid the thin smile of De Sanctis, who went upward as a cat moves, soundless and swift, pausing at the stair-head a moment beneath the flat, toneless shading of the single incandescent.

And for a moment, as he stood there, listening, holding his breath, his face under the light seemed all at once like the face of a devil; Satanic, demoniac, almost, in its suggestion of controlled and eager anticipation.

His hand, claw-like, malformed, reached forward now, so that his shadow, flung upon floor and wall in sable silhouette, seemed like the shadow of a Djinn, its talons menacing that door and the man living behind it.

He knocked, and with the opening of the door the expression was wiped from his face as if it had never been there; he smiled now at the lean figure fronting him in the doorway, summoning a courtly bow. One hand behind him, it was as if he had all at once removed a mask, holding it for the moment out of sight.

"De Sanctis—ah——!" said Gammage with a long-drawn sigh.

The man who had opened to him was lean and tall, dressed in an indescribable motley of rags and patches, but with the face of a fierce old eagle—nose, a jutting beak; smile, faint and wintry as the sun on ice.

He stepped backard now, his face inscrutable under the light, welcoming the actor with a quick, agitated

"Come in! Come in!"

There had seemed a curious eagerness about it; an undertone of strain, the fluttering of the white hands, emphasized it. He began to breathe heavily, as a man who had been running.

De Sanctis went through that doorway; it clanged shut behind him with a hollow crash like a summons of doom. He turned to the recluse with a satiric gesture and a mouthing grimace:

" 'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself
breathes forth
Contagion to this world.
Now could I drink——"

He broke off with a sudden, gasping cry:

"That—that!" he cried in a hard whisper, one rigid hand outstretched to the table and that which was upon it.

There was a beaker there, a flagon of old faience, but there was no wine in it. The man who had drunk from it had tasted death there in the old time, as they both knew. Under the lights it shone a ruddy-golden, then red as blood. But it was not the sight of this alone that had drawn from the actor that sudden, gasping cry.

For there were bags upon that table—gold and notes—Gammage's treasure. It was the first time that the actor had ever seen it with Gammage. Privily, through the keyhole, however, he had seen it, and the sight had set his pulses hammering to the thick beating of his heart. And it had been following this, as if he *knew*, that the recluse had done something to that keyhole. But now:

"That—that!" repeated De Sanctis, and at what he read in the gaze of the miser he took two swift, backward steps.

Gammage's voice came low, harsh, with a sudden, tense excitement:

"You know—how I got it, De Sanctis!" he said. "You *always* knew—ha! Well—and dead men tell no tales—is it not so, my friend? Now——"

His voice cracked sharply in the middle register, the veins in his neck and temples gorged suddenly with the pressure. There came a straining heave—a grunt—the quick flash of a knife-blade, like an arrowed flame—a choked gurgle—a heavy, slumping fall—silence.

The door remained shut, the door of life—and of death.

And upon De Sanctis that door had been closed forever.

For, as De Sanctis, he was never seen again.

CHAPTER TWO

DE SANCTIS had disappeared. In the neighborhood he had been known as a derelict, merely, and nothing more; as such he had dropped out of sight on more than one occasion in the past; his disappearance, therefore, occasioned no comment.

No one had seen the actor as he had entered the doorway of the tenement; of this the killer was quite certain and more than certain. But the murderer was biding his time; a week, say, to make assurance doubly sure, and he would be away, he told himself—out, beyond—China, the Cinq Ports—he had known them aforetime as the fingers of his hand.

He stood a moment now under the blazing electric in his dingy chamber in his suit of rags and patches, gloating now with his thin-lipped, sneering smile, the mouth beneath the jutting eagle's-beak indrawn at the corners in a suggestive grimace.

De Sanctis was gone. All that remained of the dead man were merely a few handfuls of fine white dust in the great tub in which he had been calcined to nothingness beneath the action of that corrosive chemical.

The head with the jutting eagle's-beak bent lower, the voice came in a blurring mumble above the tub:

"Ay—shreds and patches, ye gomeril—shreds and patches—ashes to ashes, dust to dust!"

His laugh crackled harshly in the thick silence at the infamous adaptation.

Gammage had been an absteminous man, but now the tall figure, with hair a sable-silvered, turned to a cupboard at his elbow. He drank now—once, twice—and the sting of the vicious contraband sang in his veins like fire. In a very little while now he would be free, he *was* free, the world was his oyster. And somewhere in the back of his brain there persisted a phrase that he had read somewhere or somewhere heard pronounced:

"Dead men rise up never!"

Somehow it comforted him, as if, if such were needed, he welcomed confirmation of

the fact that the man whom he had killed had gone, indeed, never to return.

But, pshaw! the dead man was doubly dead; he had disappeared, indeed, without trace—a *corpus delicti* that would never rise, even with a dumb tongue, to tell his story.

He was—safe.

Gammage had been a meticulously careful man, a precise one, in spite of the rags that he affected, but tonight his fingers were all thumbs. The man from whom he had taken that treasure he had murdered in cold blood, and the disappearance of De Sanctis he had planned with a cold, careful deliberation that had taken account even of the hundredth chance. And as between the two, the recluse and the actor, it would have been difficult to say as to which had been, in villainy, the greater.

But there was something it seemed that he had forgotten, or, rather, two things. What were they? Perhaps the unaccustomed tipple had upset him—yes, that was it.

There was an old-fashioned, cracked mirror on a chest of drawers beside the bed. He approached this now in a sort of stupid peering, steering an erratic course across the floor.

The mirror gave back a blurred and distorted mimicry of likeness, and that was all; he could make little of it. But still—there was something out of place, he could not put his finger on it.

Well, in the morning he would remember. Meanwhile, God, how sleepy he was! He prepared for bed by the simple expedient of throwing himself, dressed as he was, upon it. And as he dropped off to sleep a light rain was beginning to hiss and patter upon the roof-tops, falling alike upon the just and unjust.

The murderer, fathoms deep in dreams, slept with the dead man in that silent chamber.

CHAPTER THREE

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT DENNISON, halting a moment in the press of traffic at the corner of Hudson and Vandam streets, was turning on his heel northward along the crowded way, when, of a sudden at sight of the tall scarecrow in his path, he whirled.

Dennison was tired; he had had a hard day, or, rather, night of it, in the pursuit of certain vendors of a deleterious white powder whose customers were known variously as "snowbirds," "cokies," "burnee snuffers"; although, as a matter of fact, the "snow" had given place to the needle within the past year or two.

The detective had rather more imagination than the average plainclothes man; he could put two and two together and frequently find them five, on occasion; he was wondering now if perhaps it might be barely possible that the tall figure with the high-arched nose might be a coke fiend.

He had a sort of nodding acquaintance with the man; he knew him merely as an eccentric sort of recluse who was something of a mystery, and there was something that he was remembering, too, as the man's eyes lifted on a sudden to his across the milling crowd.

Dennison knew the man merely as Gammage. He had known De Sanctis, also, but the matter of the actor's disappearance had registered merely as a passing interest, following the perfunctory report of the latter's landlady. But the thing that he was remembering now was fresh in his memory. There had been a round-up of suspicious characters only the week previous; Dennison had been in the masked line-up, as usual, and, from behind the shelter of his mask, he had beheld Gammage there, furtive-eyed, a trifle sullen, but the detective at the moment had thought little of it.

There had been nothing against the recluse; they had gotten him in the dragnet, and that was all; but the plainclothes-man himself, unknown to Gammage, had given him a close inspection, examining his eyes for indications of the habitual drug-user.

He had found none such, but now, as he swung round on his heel fronting the scarecrow across the walk, the latter made a sudden, darting rush.

Dennison's fingers closed on the ragged coat-sleeve with a grip of iron.

"Easy does it, old-timer!" he advised him softly. "Now—what's your hurry? A heavy date—eh, what? Is that it?"

His fingers tightened on the ragged sleeve as the man in rags lifted a haggard face:

"Oh—good-morning, Sergeant," he quavered, in a high, sing-song falsetto. "Not going—anywhere special—no, sir—just taking the air."

The detective nodded a trifle grimly.

"Uh-huh!" he said. The words might have meant anything or nothing. De Sanctis he had known for a cokie, a sniffer; he had grilled the actor more than once in the past on suspicion of his being a dope peddler. As for Gammage—well, after all, he was not quite so sure, for there was something more than furtive now in the man's attitude—a queer blending of evident terror and an odd defiance. The man's voice came now in a slurring mumble:

"I ain't done nothin', Mister!" he said.

With the words he appeared to tremble slightly as with a chill, and it was not cold. And for a moment, too, behind those slits of eyes, wary, cunning, burning, deep-down, with a still fire, there seemed on a sudden to leap a hot, avid spark.

His face all at once a gray and pallid mask, his hand, in a darting thrust, had reached behind him even as he made two stiff, backward steps. But whatever had been the ragged man's intention, the plainclothes-man was beforehand with him.

His own hand, with the speed of light like a striking snake, had shot forward as a wrestler reaches for a hand-hold; the steel fingers bit into the scarecrow's wrist. There came a twisting heave, a grunt, and the detective, face on a level with the derelict's, eye to eye, spoke out of the corner of his mouth:

"Now—lissen here—you—Gammage—or whatever you call yourself, no monkey business—are you wise? Or it'll be the hoosgow for yours—get me? A drag in stir, old-timer—eh? You watch your step!"

Under his grip the plainclothes-man felt that arm stiffen as if thewed with steel, then strangely relax as the derelict's voice come:

"I—I didn't mean nothin', Mister—honest t' Gawd, I didn't!"

The face under the battered derby seemed all at once to waver, to fall in upon itself, the lips fumbling above the stained and blackened teeth. Dennison, regarding the man eye to eye, stared silently for a long half-minute, his grim mouth tightening at the corners. Then,

"Hell!" he said, eyes wide in a sudden, abrupt understanding, merged with a half-incredulous unbelief. For that which he had seen, staring at him out of the eyes of the man who faced him, was past belief, or, rather, it was too horrible to be true; he could not credit it.

And for a moment as he looked, staring into those pale eyes, he was abruptly conscious of a quick twinge of almost superstitious fear. But, pshaw! such things did not happen in this day and age, he told himself; they could not.

The detective was a man of some education; he was an omnivorous reader; if he spoke in the argot of his environment it was because it had become a habit. And suddenly the thing that he had seen was clear, clear even as it had sprung at him out of the pale eyes of the man opposite; it was at once the explanation of a suspicion that had been growing on him.

But he would make assurance doubly sure. The hand in his pocket fingering the manacles fell away; releasing the bony wrist, he turned on his heel with a parting

"Well, so long, old-timer; and remember, you watch your step!"

CHAPTER FOUR

BUT Dennison had no intention of losing sight of the derelict. With what he had seen, and what he knew, his previous half-suspicion of Gammage as a seller of heroin had crystallized into a certainty of something else, and that certainty led him now, a half-block in the rear, in unobtrusive pursuit of the tall nondescript in the battered hat and the eyes of death.

Dennison was a pastmaster at shadowing, but the man whom he followed now, as if he knew that he was followed, turning and

doubling like a fox, went forward, deeper and deeper, into that jungle of mean streets criss-crossing in a network of alleys and dim turnings southward from the village into a still fouler purlieu.

Twice the detective had almost lost him, and once the drifting shadow just ahead had wheeled sharply to the right-about, pale eyes boring into the shadows at his back.

Dennison had flattened himself, immovable, just out of sight around a corner, and his quarry had gone on.

It had come on to evening with a drizzling rain, and as the chase continued Dennison, thinking of De Sanctis, was almost sorry that he had not put the irons upon the recluse back there at the corner of Hudson and Vandam. The actor he had known as a "hophead"; he had seen it in his dull eyes when he had first picked him up on a street corner a short year in the past.

And if Camera-Eye Sheridan at Headquarters never had forgotten a face, Detective-Sergeant Dennison was something more than an expert in expression; he had a faculty for remembering the little things as shifting straws in a jig-saw pattern-puzzle, and it was this indeed which had for a moment led him to believe that he had seen—well—a ghost, say, back there at that main-traveled corner.

He was crossing Hudson street again, his quarry perhaps twenty paces ahead, when the passage of a heavy truck, intervening for a split-second, hid the fugitive from his view.

Reaching the opposite curb, he looked, then looked again, stifling a quick word in his throat.

The derelict had vanished.

Dennison, accustomed to snap decisions, for once was at a loss. Time pressed, and there before him were three streets—three different ways, any one of which the tall scarecrow might have chosen. But the plainclothes-man did not hesitate.

If his hunch was right, it would be the river and the docks. And in a moment, as he had gone on westward to the river, there, a short block in advance, he saw Gammage hurrying now with long strides to that dim glow in the night sky which was the Jersey coast-line and the water-front.

Three blocks, and the detective from the shadow of a warehouse wall watched as the lean figure made a darting swoop, disappearing for the moment in a steamship ticket-office just across the way.

Dennison chose the opportunity to cross the street. He waited now just out of sight as his man abruptly reappeared. Then, between two ticks of the watch, the plainclothes-man was inside.

"Yep—Rio—sailing to-night," vouchsafed the clerk to Dennison's quick question. The officer was well known to him; in times past he had aided the detective on more than one occasion. "And say, Denny"—he flashed a bundle of folding-money as big as your arm—"sure——" he was beginning.

But the rest was spoken to the plainclothes-man's back; it had been enough.

Dennison had lost little time. His quarry was just ahead, plainly now in no fear of pursuit; the detective had no trouble in keeping him in sight. He could have made the "pinch" at any moment now, but that was not Dennison's way; he knew whom it was he followed, and that was enough. For of one thing he was convinced: he would strike twelve in his warfare on the dope ring with the capture of this lean wraith with the haunted eyes and the face of death; this man who was not a crook and yet worse than any crook, recluse indeed only in seeming, a wolf of the city jungles and of the night.

But as the chase led backward to that dingy tenement the plainclothes-man, pausing on the opposite curb, waited until the tall figure, like a drifting ghost, had disappeared in the black maw of the darkened hallway just beyond. Then he was across the street and in at the door.

The hallway was dark and silent, foul and dark even at high noon. The detective as he went upward felt for his service pistol, walking on the balls of his feet, one hand before him feeling along the wall, his gaze strained upward against the velvet black to where, at the stair-head, there shone the dim gleaming of the single incandescent.

It was evening, but the house was dark and silent save for the squeak and scurry of rats in the wainscot, with, as from a world removed, the night noises of the city in a vague shadow of clamor, faint and far.

The fugitive had gone in; there could be no doubt of that; he was in his room. But —if he was the man that Dennison took him to be he would be armed and desperate, with the desperate, cold courage of the cornered jungle-rat. And even now, as it might chance, he might be there in the shadows, crouching, lip lifting from his stained and blackened teeth, pistol leveled at the officer's heart.

But nothing and nobody molested him as he went forward. Reaching the stair-head and pausing before the door, the detective listened a moment at the keyhole. But he could hear nothing. He knocked twice, a heavy, booming rap, loud in the stillness; and then faint but distinct, penetrating outward through the heavy door, he heard it, a brief, metallic click — the release of the safety catch of an automatic.

With the sound a line of light spread suddenly beneath the door. Was he coming out?

Dennison, peering through the keyhole, froze suddenly to marble. For, staring back at him even as he gazed, an eye was looking into his.

Dennison wasted no time. Leaping to his feet, he hurled himself against that door shoulder-high, as a plunging fullback hurdling the line. It snapped, crashed, fell inward, as Dennison, his automatic at the ready, burst into the room.

Then his startled oath gave back its echo, and that was all. For bare and empty under the light the chamber stretched before him.

There was no one there.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE detective standing by the ruin of the door made a quick, frowning survey of the long room. It was a mean, cheap room in a mean house; its sole furniture a battered table, two chairs, the low bed in the corner. The light blazing from mid-ceiling shone full upon every nook and corner.

And there was no one there.

But there was a narrow door in a far corner; it was the bath-room, fitted as in most of the ancient dwellings of the neighborhood with a huge porcelain tub.

Now at a faint sound from behind that narrow door the detective made a plunging rush—in time. For, with his fingers upon the knob, there came a crash of glass, a turgid oath; wrenching at it, he flung wide the door in time to see the frantic figure in the window, the huge, misshapen hands writhing now in a last desperate effort to escape, shoulders hunched tightly in the narrow frame.

But he was not yet done. Even as the detective's barking order rang through the room a hand reached backward; there came the heavy crash of the pistol, roaring in that narrow space with a sudden sound like thunder.

But Dennison, diving under the flash, gripped one bony ankle in an iron fist; there followed a quick heave, a straining curse. and backward into that charnel of the dead the fugitive, clawing for a hand-hold like an animal, came clawing inward like a bag.

"That's it—easy does it!" grated the detective. "Now——"

He jerked the limp figure upright with one powerful hand, with the other reaching for the handcuffs in his pocket. But with the motion his prisoner, backing sullenly against the wall, lifted a haggard face etched deep with lines and ridges, which even as the detective watched appeared to melt together in a watery smear. Lips twitching in an uncontrollable spasm, shoulders hunched, he mouthed abruptly:

"Well, you've got me!"

The man, himself an addict, had reached and passed the saturation point. Lips fumbling together in a grotesque and terrible supplication, now he lifted his hands in an aimless fluttering, jerking sidewise at the wrists as if impelled by an agency invisible.

"I—I'll come clean!" he said in a strange

throaty whisper, as the plainclothes-man, bending close, snapped between set teeth:

"You will—but it won't be necessary! I knew you, and I'll tell you how—and why. You were clever, but you were not quite clever enough. You forgot that the real Gammage had never been a cokie, even if you remembered it! And that stunt of the mirror and the keyhole, you know about that—ha? It held me for a moment, but only for a moment. And there was one other little thing you overlooked, or perhaps we should call it two: his eyes, you rotten killer, his eyes! Because those eyes were *black*, and yours are—blue!"

He paused, his gaze upon his prisoner in a sort of brooding wonder.

"The hooch and the needle—you can't beat 'em! And they beat you, didn't they? Why, you should 've known——"

He broke off with a sudden cry as the man with the high-arched nose gave a peculiar, strangled gasp. Abruptly he leaned sidewise, a red froth edging his stiff lips; he tottered, buckling inward at the knees, to fall in a slumping huddle on his face. He twitched a moment and then lay still.

He had been clever, but not quite clever enough; as an actor, as a master of make-up, he had impersonated Gammage to the life, following his murder of the recluse. But he had forgotten one thing, or rather, two: he had completely forgotten, if he had ever thought of it, that the recluse's eyes had been black, whereas his own were blue.

That was what the detective had seen, and that was at once the reason and the explanation.

For DeSanctis, master of make-up, the curtain had rung down.

GIRLS AS DECOYS

HOW pretty young girls are used as decoys and scouts by hold-up men to obtain information concerning the removal of large sums of money was disclosed through the confession of a participant in a recent hold-up.

Morton Moss, a young advertising clerk formerly in the employ of the General Cigar Company, and Samuel Marrone, an ex-convict chauffeur, have been indicted in connection with the $18,345 payroll hold-up of the company. In this hold-up, which occurred inside the cigar company's building, former Police Detective Edward Kelly was shot twice. Kelly has recovered and appeared as a witness against Moss and Marrone.

The police announced that Moss, a relative of an official of the company and a trusted employee, made the confession, laying bare the cunning planning of the hold-up men.

The alleged confession was made to an operative of the Browne-Rykert Detective Agency and to Detective Samuel Marron of the Fifth avenue squad.

The police and the District Attorney declined to make known the identity of the young woman employed by the gunmen, but did disclose that it was she who gleaned from Moss the information concerning the movements of Kelly and a clerk of the cigar company when handling the payroll. It is said that the young woman is from a good family and that her father is a jeweler in Maiden Lane.

According to the confession of Moss, he met the young woman through a subway flirtation about two months previous to the holdup. They began visiting all-night dancing places and cabarets. Finally, a short time before the robbery, they spent an evening at a cabaret in upper Seventh avenue.

While there, the confession relates, one of the gunmen danced with the young woman and plied her with questions concerning Moss's knowledge of the movements of the cigar company's payroll and the amount and asked her if she "thought Moss was game to enter a scheme to get the payroll."

She is reported to have asked Moss many questions concerning the payroll.

The Man in the Yellow Ulster

By DWIGHT L. ALVERSON

FRED WELLS had consented to "Red" Dorgan's incessant pleading—he had written home for money.

Two years previous Fred had decided that Staplehurst was entirely too small for him to achieve any great amount of success; opportunities were too few and far between, and as a result he had honored New York with his presence.

The reckless manner in which Fred lived since his acquaintance with Dorgan had stunted his former ambitions. There were few virtues left in his soul now and these few were dormant. Of course, he had retained a part of his conscience, but his self-respect became a smoldering pile of ashes. Red was ordained with excellent deceptive powers and was a "shark" at cards. His knowledge of Fred's small but envied bank-account afforded him a few hours of entertainment at his favorite pastime—draw-poker. The boy was rendered penniless and owed Red the sum of five hundred dollars. His credit had been abused, and there was not a chance, but a possibility, of his father relenting and sending him some cash. Fred had promised Red that he would send home for money, but at each attempt he faltered. Red retained but had modified his friendship for Fred, merely because of the probability of receiving the five hundred dollars. One evening Red strolled into Flaharty's card-room. His victim sat on a bench near the table smoking a cigarette.

"Did'ja send to yer ol' man fer de coin?" asked Dorgan as he seated himself at the table.

"I mailed a letter early this morning," answered Wells sullenly.

"D'ye think he'll shell out?" Dorgan questioned.

"I'm not sure. Dad told me when I left home to never come crying to him for money."

Dorgan began dealing out a deck of cards for a game of solitaire and remained silent. Wells could not think of an excuse to continue the conversation so he lighted another cigarette, inhaling deeply and allowing the smoke to curl lazily from his nostrils.

It was raining outside and the pavement was quite slippery, as the skidding automobiles testified. Drops of rain glistened on every windowpane exposed, and the heavy, low-hanging clouds were responsible for the premature darkness.

"Red, won't you hold back a while if Dad refuses to come through?" asked Fred after a while, interrupting Dorgan at his game.

"Naw, I won't," growled Dorgan. "Whaddye think I am?"

"How am I to get the dough, then? Perhaps you have some brilliant ideas. Spring 'em; I'll bite."

"I told ye once how to git it." Dorgan's eyes darkened and he leaned his leering face closer to Fred's. "Ye kin pry up winders same as me an' lots uv others."

"I can't do that," objected Wells. "I know I'm getting to be a bum, but I simply can't steal."

"Then yer know what ye kin do? Yer remember what I promised? Had ye rather have me give yer away ter yer father?"

Fred's face flushed crimson, his knuckles showed white under the skin as he clenched his fists.

"Red, I——"

"Yer kin do whut I said an' nuthin' more," interrupted Dorgan, again attentive to his cards.

The front door of the card-room opened

softly and "Jiggs" Preston, dope-fiend, gambler and crook, glided noiselessly into the room and dropped into a chair at the table where Wells and Dorgan were seated.

"Dey's a guy comin' in on de Central tonight at ten wid a whole mint. Gobel heard about it at some jerkwater station up de line, and phoned in 'bout a half-hour ago. De guy's wearin' a yeller ulster and a gray hat. He sez yer kain't 'elp but reckernize 'im."

Dorgan's eyes narrowed to mere slits and a sardonic smile played on his thin lips; then he turned abruptly to Wells.

"Here's yer chance, kid," he said. "Yer kin go wid us tonight and help knock out dat bozo, and we'll split wid yer. Watcha say?"

Wells did not answer immediately; he paused, considering.

"Well?" asked Preston expectantly, for he wanted to throw the dirty work on some one else.

"I'll do it," Wells answered feebly, his hand shaking as if palsied. He loosened his collar and rose from the table preparatory to leaving. The boy was desperate with fear of his infamy becoming known to his father.

"Yer ain't goin' tuh t'row a fit, are ye?" queried Dorgan, looking up at him dubiously.

"You know what I think of jobs like this, so why be alarmed?" Wells replied angrily. He seated himself again at the table and buried his chalk-white face in his arms.

Two hours later three figures slouched out through Flaharty's front door into the driving rain, headed for the Central Station. One of the figures walked listlessly; the other two were more purposeful and intent.

As they drew near the station the boy's courage gave out and he paused.

"Red," he said, "I can't do it."

Dorgan did not answer. Fred was turning back when Dorgan grabbed his arm and jerked him forward bodily.

"We'll wait here," announced Dorgan. "When the guy comes out Fred and me'll knock 'im cold and, Jiggs, you git the cab ready."

Dorgan walked down toward the tracks, while Wells, too cowardly to resist, was stationed at the entrance. Jigs scurried out for a cab. Soon Red came bounding back and, uttering an oath, exclaimed:

"It's a dead cinch, here he comes now!"

Simultaneously Jiggs arrived with the cab, driven by Buckner, an old crony. Few people were on the street and luck seemed to favor the criminals. His head lowered, in an effort to shield his face from the rain, the man in the yellow ulster moved unsuspecting into the trap. Fred glided behind him, gripping a weapon. There was a thud and a muffled cry and the man was pushed into the waiting taxicab. Wells and Dorgan hurried in, supporting his body.

For half an hour the cab splashed through the rain-sodden streets until the main business district was left behind. It was an easy matter to relieve the unfortunate stranger of his satchel of currency, and his body was thrown from the car to the curb. The cab then turned back to town and deposited its passengers at their respective places of abode. The driver had received a goodly portion of the swag as hush-money.

Arriving at his room, Fred hurried his preparations for sleep. As he was removing his collar and tie he was shocked to discover a yellow envelope on the boudoir. He picked up the telegram and hurriedly tore it open and read:

"Sending two thousand by my friend Griffen tonight. He will arrive at ten, wearing a yellow ulster and gray hat.

"FATHER."

Home on Honor

By HOWARD PHILIP RHOADES

WARDEN YATES had a look of earnest question as he shook hands with the departing convict.

"You're going home on honor, Ash," he said, "until your wife's crisis is past. Don't forget it's your fine record which made this possible. How you carry out the trust may mean something later."

The stalwart warden clung for a moment to the hand of the man before him, continuing to stare at him penetratingly, as if he had a serious and earnest desire to know what was in his soul.

In Burton Ash the warden saw a man not far beyond twenty-five, above medium height, and with a native strength of limb and clear healthful color of skin which three years of prison life had not taken away. Moreover, his blue eyes had a free, straightforward look which had attracted the warden from the first, and led him to believe this man different from the great mass of the prison's inmates.

It was this appraisal of Ash, as against the fact that he was serving ten years for confessed robbery, that led to Warden Yates's look of earnest question. The warden had made a record with his honor system. But he had, of course, his critics. Recently "honor men" had escaped; the critics had croaked. Now the warden was defying them by a gamble in which he would send another man home, and allow him to return entirely upon his honor. Small wonder that he still had a look of intense and earnest question as Ash passed out of the great clanking gates.

Temporarily free! The world looked brighter than for three years. The air of an early spring afternoon entered his nostrils intoxicatingly as Ash stepped into the car which was to take him to the station. The days of old, when he was independent, unrestrained, came back as the car sped off. But now it turned and passed beside the high gray walls. A depressed sigh escaped him. After all, he was not permanently free. He was coming back. But at least these few hours or days he would be his own master—and, what was more important, he would be with his critically ill wife.

When the train swept up to the station Ash stepped aboard and went through a passenger-coach into the smoker. He dropped into a corner, hoping nobody would sit opposite. He wanted to be alone—to think. In the three years since he had traveled over this railroad to the prison he had learned a great deal. Chiefly, he had decided that if he ever got free he would never again transgress.

The penitentiary had completed Ash's reformation. The son of normal, worthy parents, he owed his prison sentence primarily to the death of his father years ago. This catastrophe had taken away the family's financial prop. There had been younger children. For them and Burton his mother pushed her slender strength to the limit. She had hardly survived his marriage four years ago. And in the years when he should have been in school Burton had gone to work in a factory.

Never had he missed a day's work until the unhappy winter which resulted in his arrest. He had always worked steadily, but under a curious handicap. In his early manhood he had been the victim of a strange reaction. Filled with high spirits and gifted with great strength, he had been given to pranks. Some of his energy, too, was di-

verted into rebellion against the fate which had started him out equal in opportunity to other boys, and then dropped him by the wayside.

Burton Ash had been arrested for fighting, for disorderly conduct. Policemen leeringly told the court that they knew him as an habitual scrapper and had had trouble with him before. College or high-school boys might vent their animal spirits through football or class rushes. They might even destroy property, and it would be called only a prank. But factory boys? The Court, falling into an error as old as humanity, shook his head as he meted out a fine, or a short jail sentence.

That was the life from which Ash gradually had been turning since his marriage. Flora Long had played with Burton Ash as a child, in the days before his father died. She knew his inner heart, and she married him against the advice of her only relative, an aunt, who had since died. That was when she was a stenographer at the Quinn Lamp Works, and Burton, a fine-looking, square-shouldered lad, had about completed his trade there as electrician.

Gradually Ash's marriage had wrought changes, even with the appearance of one little one, and Flora had contrived to fit up their little frame cottage comfortably on Burton's slender salary. By care, in the prosperous era immediately following the war, she made Burton's overtime wages accumulate enough to make a small payment on their cottage. Burton gradually had been won away from the old saloon, which was now a soft drink place in name only. Flora talked of a small electrical store they would buy and operate together.

Then came the industrial slump. Ash was one of the last laid off. But, awaiting spring, when, it was said, work again would start, trouble came. They ran out of money and got behind in their payments on the home. Ash worked at odd jobs, but there were periods of idleness. He drifted back to the bar. One day a stranger appeared who glanced about with dark eyes beneath bushy eyebrows. A bantering remark was dropped with reference to some of Ash's differences with the police. Ash resented it. The stranger noted it—and cultivated Ash.

He learned of Ash's worry over unemployment, his need of money. He spoke of a large stake to be made easily. Why not work one evening and fix yourself for years? the stranger argued. At first Ash wouldn't listen. Then there was an evening when he sought the corner resort with a stinging memory of Flora—the yellow-haired, brown-eyed Flora, who had given up a competence to share his fortunes—a memory of Flora breaking down over the supper dishes, and crying piteously. Coffee and bread for three—and now these were gone. Credit ended, the baby ill and in rags—worst of all, the brown eyes of his courageous little wife filled with tears, her slender figure shaking with sobs, as she momentarily lost heart.

He stood for a moment, his strong hands upon her heaving shoulders, the look of a primitive man at bay upon his face. Then he went to the stranger, whose name he had learned was Jim Thatcher, and listened.

That had led up to his arrest. Now, in his seat in the smoker, he shuddered as the culmination came before him. He raised his eyes to look into the dark, burning orbs of a bearded man who was passing. Ash was vaguely conscious that the bearded man stared at him inquiringly. He looked after him. Something in the man's walk, in the set of his shoulders, seemed to stir some dim memory. But Ash shook his head. He didn't remember the man, evidently. He gazed out the window. Evening was approaching. The warden had decided to let him go home after the departure of the noon express, and this train would hardly reach Rollins before nine.

Ash was stirred from his revery by a hand upon his shoulder. He looked up to find the dark, burning eyes of the bearded man staring at him more intently than ever.

"Don't I know you?" asked the stranger in a voice even more familiar than his figure.

Ash returned the scrutiny.

"I ought to know *you*," he admitted. "But——"

"Ain't your name Ash? Didn't you used to live in Rollins?"

"Yes."

"And you don't know me?"

"No."

A harsh, disagreeable chuckle came from the other man's mouth.

"You're not alone in your loss of memory," he said. "There's lots of others who ought to know me—but don't. I remember you. That's why I'm going to tell you who I am."

Ash waited while the other man chuckled on irritatingly. Then the bearded man continued:

"Remember a night in January three years ago when two men——"

"Thatcher!"

Ash uttered the name in astonishment, quickly followed by anger. He grasped the man beside him as if bent on personal violence.

"You don't need to get rough!" said Jim Thatcher, pulling away. "What's the matter?"

"You ask me, the fellow you sent to the pen, what's the matter?"

"Sent to the pen? I don't get you."

"You don't remember that we heard a noise just as we were opening the safe, and how you slipped out to see what it was? You don't recall seeing the police coming in on us from the other direction, just as you came back? You didn't slam the door so it covered your get-away, but locked me in? You don't remember beating it instead of making a battle to save a pal——"

Thatcher tried to be brusque.

"Who wouldn't run to save himself? I didn't know that door had a lock that would snap. Anyhow, I thought you'd drop out that back window."

"Yes, with it nailed tight!"

"But you did get away, didn't you?"

"Yes, with two bulls with guns on me. Yes, I got away, a month later, for the stir."

"You mean you did time?"

"You saw where I got on, Thatcher."

"I swear I didn't."

"That don't matter, but just remember, I'm done. I won't squeal on you, but I'm through."

Ash rose, his breast heaving inside his ill-fitting new prison clothes, his voice threatening to break. Thatcher caught his arm. "Wait, Ash," he said in a low tone. "You're foolish to get mad at what was—just natural. I know you'll never tell on me. You ain't no squealer. That's why I'm going to tell you something. I'm heading back to that home town of yours, and I've got something good. You'd never had known me, and I need not have told you, only I figures, 'I bet that fellow thinks I gave him a raw deal. Well, I'll show him I'm on the level. I'll let him in on——'"

Ash drew angrily away.

"You can't pull that, Thatcher," he said. "I'm through, I told you."

Thatcher leaned close, a look of cunning in his dark, burning eyes.

"The Quinn Lamp Company," he said, "keeps a whale of a pay-roll in its safe all night every Friday, to pay off the night shift Saturday morning——"

Ash had torn away, his blue eyes flashing, his face very red. He went the length of the car and sat down. For a time his brain didn't work right. Only his emotions functioned. Indignation gave way to rage, to hatred. Then, a trifle thickly at first, he began to think. The Quinn Lamp Company's plant. He was familiar with the place, as he had learned the electrician's trade there. Flora had worked in the place when they were married. It was a huge, prosperous factory, given over to the making of automobile lamps.

Suddenly he straightened. The Quinn Lamp Works had its office connected with its plant, and the office was completely hedged about with burglar alarms. How could Thatcher, or any other burglar, get in? On the heels of this thought came another so amazing that it almost made him cry out. The Quinn Lamp Company's office was completely hedged around with burglar alarms *in all places save one!*

Ash's breath came fast. He had assisted the contractor who installed the alarms. Not a window or door in that building could be opened at night without summoning watchmen and police, *except one*. His eyes shone at the thought. A new state fire law had forced the factory to add one new door at the west side of the office. The manager

had called in the chief electrician and Ash, his assistant, and talked of extending the burglar alarm to this door. It developed that drilling a cement and steel wall was necessary. Temporarily it had been put off. Ash knew of at least a year in which nothing had been done. Since then both the chief electrician and the manager had left. There was a chance that they had neglected to wire this door.

His face darkened. In the rear of the car was Jim Thatcher, the man responsible for his having gone to the penitentiary, the man who would be responslble should Flora die. For Ash suspected his wife's illness was due to having to battle for a living unaided. His father's death might have forced him into wrong associations, but Flora was the angel who had saved him. Had saved him only to have her good work undone, her life threatened by Thatcher.

Ash was consumed with rage as he thought what might have happened had he never listened to Thatcher. They would have got through till spring somehow. There would have been work. By now, with the return of prosperity, they might have been on the high road to fortune. Instead, his name was dishonored. He had still seven years to serve. The babies—a second had come soon after he went to prison—must grow up to the inevitable taunt that their father was a jailbird. And Flora——

There was just one safe way into the Quinn Lamp Works. Thatcher wanted him to go. Forgetting all his good resolves, all his carefully thought-out decisions never again to depart from the right path, Burton Ash rose. He would guide Thatcher into the Quinn Lamp Works' office. Then——

He forced a more pleasant look as he walked back to the bearded man. He smiled, as if convinced in spite of himself, as he said:

"Thatcher, I've changed my mind. When I got out, of course, I——"

"I know," sneered Thatcher; "they're all like that. Going to quit and be good, but they end by keeping right on and being sensible. What chance has a poor man in this country, anyhow? Some can starve, if they want to, but for me——"

Steeped in the belief that reform was not only hopeless but undesirable, Thatcher thought it the most natural thing in the world that Ash should accept. So he pursued his dissertation on the universal unfitness of things until Ash interrupted:

"But why do you need me; why not go ahead alone?"

"Same reason as before," said Thatcher. "You know the ground. You've got guts and you're square. It won't be like the last time. There won't be any slip."

"I'll say not. All right, Thatcher, I'll go on a fifty-fifty basis. But only on the understanding that I'm outside man."

"Outside man," Thatcher objected. "We don't need any."

"Why not? This office is close to the factory where there are hundreds of men working on the night shift. And with a watchman like Johnny Morgan, who's probably still there, going the rounds every half-hour or so——"

"But I want you inside with me."

"I'm nervous since I was caught, Jim; I want to be careful."

"Nervous? What's the matter? Here I am free for the last three years after a dozen jobs——"

"That's the only way I'll go, Thatcher." Ash rose as if to leave.

"Now wait," said Thatcher, grasping his arm. "Don't get sore again. We'll do it like that, if you insist. What I'm worried about is, a fellow told me this place is all wired up with burglar alarms, and you can't get in."

"A lot of talk. We'll open a door that isn't wired and see how fast the cops come before we go in. Don't forget, I'm taking no chances this time."

"If it's all settled, when do we go in? Any Friday is good."

"Friday? Why, today's Friday. Why not tonight?"

"We need a little time to look it over. Next week would be better."

"I don't see how. You've got all your stuff along, haven't you?"

Thatcher indicated his small hand-bag.

"All right, then," said Ash, "tonight's the night. I don't want to stay in Rollins a week

for people to look me over. If you want my help, Thatcher, tonight's the night."

Thatcher finally agreed. On Ash's suggestion they parted, and did not get together again until shortly before nine, when the train began to enter the Rollins yards. The boarding-house of Mrs. Barnes, at which Flora and the children had been staying recently, was on the same side of town as the Quinn Lamp Works. Ash planned to sacrifice little of his time in reaching his wife. He and Thatcher would get off where the train stopped to cross another railroad entering town. Then, as soon as he was free, he would not have far to go to Flora.

As the train came to a stop close to the crossing, Ash and Thatcher, at opposite ends of a car, and well out of the sight of the conductor, dropped off. Through the shadows they stole down the side of the railroad embankment and met beneath a dark viaduct. They passed down a street whose smoky shabbiness was covered by the darker mantle of night.

The large vacant lot, for which Ash was looking, still remained. They passed through a tumble-down gate and carefully crossed a large waste expanse. At last they came to a tall wooden fence. In the faint glimmer of the electric lights in the street beyond they saw this fence had none of the neglected look of the region around. It was the towering factory with great expanses of windows through which, beneath a weird violet glow, could be seen countless workmen. Closer, on the right, silent and dark, was the office building.

"Wait," Ash whispered and crept to the left. Then he drew his companion in that direction. Thatcher stumbled over a railroad switch.

"This way," said Ash, and led him close to the fence. There, dimly, Thatcher made out a gate large enough to admit a locomotive. Ash fingered it in the dark. After a moment he found a small gate, just big enough to admit a man, set into the larger one.

"Pretty careless," he whispered. "They haven't even got this one locked. Let's see if any one passes."

They crouched beside the half-opened gate and waited. From the great factory came a faint suppressed roar. But the office building on their left remained silent. Thatcher's mind was all upon the pay-roll inside. But to Ash, crouching beside him in the dark, the office pay-roll, the whole operation ahead was only a bridge to Flora's bedside. He tried to picture her with her patient brown eyes, her arms stretched out to embrace him. He tried to visualize the children; little Burt, who was now five, and Celia, the baby born after her father went to prison.

Already the forerunner of a sentiment threatening his purpose was crowding in. He felt the impulse to think it over—to ponder. But he couldn't do that. He couldn't afford to. This was a made-to-order opportunity. He grasped Thatcher by the arm and whispered: "Come on. Let's test that burglar alarm."

Thatcher followed to what seemed the logical place to enter. It was a first-floor door just inside the fence, and completely hidden in shadows. Furthermore, Ash believed, it was the one door in the building to which the burglar alarm was not attached. They would try and see.

"How are you going to work it, Thatcher?" he asked.

"Keys," said the other, probing the lock with a wire. "A cinch," he breathed after a moment. "They deserve to be cleaned out." He inserted a key which readily opened the door.

Leaving it standing open, they retreated through the gate back into the vacant lot. There at a safe distance they waited. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed. There were no developments. Only the faint, suppressed hum from the factory and silence from the office building in front of them.

"Come on," said Ash, again assailed by an impulse which threatened his purpose. "If there was an alarm fastened to that door the yard would be full of coppers by this time. Let's get it over."

They returned and entered the door. It led them through a hall to another door. With a flash Ash examined it. It did not appear to be wired for an alarm. Thatcher, with his wonderful knowledge of locks, did

not find it more difficult than the first door. After a moment they passed on to the inner office.

With quickened breath Thatcher pointed to the safe. It was in an office cut off from sight of the outside. Evidently the factory owner trusted everything to the burglar-alarm system. And why not? In fifteen years they had never had a robbery. Thatcher felt the great square safe, his eagerness showing in his dark, burning eyes.

"She's thick, but an old baby," he said. "I'll puff her easy and we'll be gone before you know it." He set his flash and took his tools from his bag.

"I'll cover the hall and door. If you need me call," said Ash.

He stepped out, then sped down the hall. Behind him, unsuspecting, was the man who not only had led him into the robbery, but had deserted him at a critical moment—the man who had branded him, his wife, his innocent children. The man whose influence threatened the one person who made life worth living. From the moment when a stern Providence seemed to place in his hand a marvelously shaped instrument of retaliation, Burton Ash had been mastered by a lust for revenge.

Every moment that he had smiled, had agreed with Thatcher, had worked with the other man shoulder to shoulder, he had been aching to cry out: "You rat, I'll put you in a trap so you'll know how it feels!" Every thought of danger, every hazard of delaying his visit to his wife had been cast aside. The Providence which made this opportunity surely would protect him. He had only to walk to a window—any window—drop out and escape. His act of escaping would bring down the police on the run.

Jim Thatcher, working trustfully inside, would suddenly find himself surrounded and in handcuffs. Of course, Thatcher would tell on him. But, if so, Ash could tell about the first crime, the one for which he was now serving. It would be unsubstantiated story against unsubstantiated story, and there was evidence to back neither. Being an honor prisoner, and having the warden with him, Ash would have a little the best of it, if anything.

He walked resolutely to a window close to the railroad gate. He had only to raise it and drop out. He would be at home with his wife before they closed in on Thatcher—closed in on him, drawn guns at his head, handcuffs rattling to be locked on his wrists, Thatcher protesting, battling, the officers of the law cold and hard.

One moment Ash was filled with a great exultation over his revenge. Then his exultant visualization of this moment brought back to him a parallel—the most vivid and terrible moment of his life—the moment when *he* had been caught. The great truth which had been struggling to get out for the past half-hour mastered him. *He was betraying Thatcher.* He was playing one wrong against another in a futile effort to produce a right!

He paused, his fingers gripping the window he intended to raise. The figure of the old, white-haired chaplain at the prison came before him. The fervor of this good old man, with his gift of abandoning the fine points of theology for a straight-from-the-shoulder religion that they all understood, had been a big factor in helping Ash in many a moment of discouragement.

"Rub out everything but the Golden Rule," the chaplain once had exhorted, "and you still have enough to rebuild your world. For how can you ever go wrong when ye do only as ye would be done by?"

Ash's fingers dropped from the window. What had he to gain by betraying Thatcher? Would it blot out his own suffering, that of his little family? Would it make Flora well? Would it get him out of prison sooner? No. On the other hand, there was danger of fearful consequences. There might be a slip. His plan of revenge had been all wrong. It was his old lawless self rising in elementary passion before he had time to think. Now he saw that this was his first big test since determining to go right. He made a little prayer of thanks that he had solved his first great problem rightly.

What remained? Nothing but to steal away. He had a momentary impulse to go back and try to dissuade Thatcher. But it was only momentary. He knew Thatcher,

so close to his goal, would shoot him down coldly if he seriously interfered. Feeling his responsibility because of having guided Thatcher in, he still could do nothing. His reparation for this last misstep would be perfection of conduct henceforth.

His mind firmly set on such course, he approached the door. It was close but not locked. He stepped out upon the concrete between the door and the fence. Only a few steps were between him and a law-abiding future. He would be home with his wife before Thatcher's deed had been completed. One step he took from the door—two. Then he stopped breathlessly, cold and trembling. Some one was coming along the pavement beside the building! He turned to go back. It was too late. A flashlight played there between him and the fence.

He moved up to the very corner beyond which a man was approaching. There in the shadows he clung to the wall and waited. Bitterly regretting ever having planned revenge upon Thatcher, he saw his whole future suddenly placed upon the balance. He saw himself, the honor prisoner, jailed for a new crime he had planned the moment he was beyond the shadow of the prison walls. He would spend the rest of his life in prison. His children, Flora, the wife he had begged to see——

It couldn't be! The man with the flashlight now was just beyond the corner, hardly five feet away. He was playing his light in the door. Now it started to turn upon the spot where Ash was slinking. One instant before discovery Ash leaped. Like a hard, dark bolt he shot through the darkness, his strong arm around those of the man with the light.

The flashlight was knocked away by the shock. Together they went in a heap against the fence. Ash was on top. Purposely, without using too much force, he butted the head of the other man against the heavy wooden fence. One low cry which the man gave was blotted out as he was dazed by the force. From his pocket Ash brought a large handkerchief. It was not a piece of State clothing, but one which Flora had sent him. With it he gagged the man on the ground.

But the man couldn't be left this way. Already he was groaning. Ash kicked against the flashlight and picked it up. Not far off was a waste box. Here was dumped trash from the office. Lifting the lid, by sheer luck he found a long piece of heavy twine. Again leaping upon the other man, who was starting to regain his faculties, he turned him upon his face and swiftly bound his arms and legs. Then he dragged him northward from the door, around the corner of a buttress of the building.

Ash turned and ran on tiptoe to the small gate. Thence he stole softly and swiftly across the vacant lot, into an alley, and so on westward for a number of blocks. Several minutes' walk brought him into a wider street. He crossed it and came to the large old frame dwelling where the kindly Mrs. Barnes had provided Flora and the children a place. He was startled to note through the glass door an unusual activity inside. Two eager-looking young men were at the elbows of Mrs. Barnes as she admitted Ash.

"Reporters, Burt," she explained.

"Our prison correspondent sent down word, Mr. Ash," said one of the newspapermen, "and we came over to cover this end. But we'd just about given you up——"

"I thought you'd drop off at the crossing," said Mrs. Barnes.

"He must have gone on to the station," suggested one of the reporters.

"Flora——" Ash began.

"The doctor wants to see you first," said Mrs. Barnes, and took him in to meet the physician.

"She's going to get well—if you can remain," the doctor explained. "It's been too much work and worry—without you. Go in quietly, embrace her and tell her you're here. But don't worry her. A shock might——"

The telephone, which was beside them, rung sharply. Mrs. Barnes answered. She looked a trifle puzzled as she listened. "Yes, he's here," she said. "All right, I'll have him stay. Who is it? Who—— Oh, he's rung off. Some one wanting to see you, Burt," she explained.

"Who?"

"He didn't say. But it must have been somebody down at the station-house. I could

hear another voice, like it was answering the telephone saying 'Police headquarters. Police headquarters.'"

"She's in the room at the head of the stairs, Mr. Ash," said the doctor. "Tell her you're back, and you're going to be with her. And, remember, be careful not to shock her."

Ash walked up the stairs in a troubled dream. Ahead was the woman who meant everything to him. His presence was going to save her life. But police headquarters wanted him. Some one was coming over. It all flashed upon him; that twine wouldn't hold a real man long. Or perhaps some one else had happened along and found the tied man. Thatcher had been surprised, had told the truth. They were coming for him!

He stood before Flora's door, his head whirling. Beside him was a window. It was over the back yard. He could drop out, renouncing everything, becoming once more a hunted fugitive. Perhaps they could lie to Flora, tell her he was coming later. She might recover. Or he might enter, embrace her, assure her it was all right. And they would come and tear him away from her—kill her!

Which? He oscillated between the door and the window. Then, suddenly, he chose. Flora! If never he had turned from her loving arms, he never would have gone wrong. Softly he opened the door. He tiptoed over to the bed. He was shocked at how pale and thin she had become. Now her eyes opened, seeming strange and far-off. She saw him, attempted to rise. He leaned over, tears streaming from his eyes, and drew her into his arms.

Now they were coming for him. Perhaps there was still time. He loosed his arms as there was a light knock on the door. Flora moaned softly. He whispered close to her ear: "I'll be back soon, dear." His lips stung, so conscious was he of lying. He went to the door.

"Captain Davis, of the police, to see you," whispered the doctor.

"I'll see him below. I'll be right down. I'll——"

The doctor started downstairs. Again Ash halted this time between the window and the stairs. Outside that window was a free world. Inside, this stairway led him down to the captain of police. As before Flora helped him decide. Within he heard her call him faintly.

He opened the door, once more knelt beside her, his tears flowing. He drew her into his arms, kissed her thin cheeks, her fevered brown eyes.

"You'll come back, won't you, Burt?" she said faintly.

"Yes, dear," he whispered and stood erect.

He would come back! If her life was spared, he would come back to her, even if they gave him twenty years. Her influence was the one big thing in his life. They might jail him, they might kill him, but they would never keep him away from Flora.

The telephone rang again as he neared the foot of the stairs. Mrs. Barnes was passing the instrument to the tall police official beside her as Ash walked into the room.

"Captain Davis talking," said the policeman. Then he said sharply: "What's that?"

"Yes, yes, yes," he responded quickly. Then: "He did get him? Yes, yes; Ash is here." Captain Davis hung up, a look of excitement on his face. Then, seeing Ash, he approached. Before the startled honor man could speak, the police official shook hands with him.

"Just wanted to make sure you got here, Ash," he said. "The doctor said your little woman's life depended on getting you back, and we went to the judge and got his support. That warden's a queer duck with his honor stuff. But now you're here, he's going to recommend your pardon. Everything going all right; you'll never go back."

Ash tried thickly to speak. The police official smiled.

"That's all right," he said. "Just measure up here as you have for the warden." Then, turning briskly to the reporters, he said: "You fellows better go with me. Over at the Quinn plant a lone robber ties up Johnny Morgan and goes in to rob the safe. Johnny gets loose and shoots the safe-cracker dead when he tries to get away."

Blood For the Moon God

By NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

GILBERT stood very straight and lowered his eyes slowly to the lifeless body at his feet. He saw his own knife, a curio he had picked up at Shanghai on his way into the interior, sheathed in the bared breast above the silken robes that the priest wore, and he clamped his jaws together hard.

Of a sudden, all the mysterious, insidious power swirling under the placid surface of life in the Orient arose in his mental vision, a dark, sinister menace. He had offended the Moon-god of Kasoti, had flouted the power of the Moon-god's shrine, and here he was, only a few short hours later, face to face with the Moon-god's vengeance.

For vengeance it obviously was. Maktu, High Priest of the Temple of the Moon Dragon, was dead—murdered. And Lane Gilbert's knife was there in his breast. He hadn't killed him, of course, but his knife was there.

Gilbert raised his eyes steadily until they met the inquiring stare of Howland, the British Commissioner.

"It's my knife," he said simply.

"I know," Howland nodded. "Pirut Shan said it was yours."

"Pirut Shan?" echoed Gilbert. "How did he know?"

"He came and told me. It was Pirut Shan who found him." Howland gestured toward the high priest's body. "He's very much dead. Anything more to say, Gilbert?"

The engineer turned to Summerfield, who was in command of the American crew working on irrigation development at Kasoti, in the heart of Shen-su. Summerfield was the oldest of the three men, but he had made no contributions to the conversation. A look of intelligence passed swiftly between the two Americans.

"I don't know how much anything I have to say will affect your actions, Howland," Gilbert replied gravely. "But I think I can perceive the reason for my knife being where it is."

"I hope you can," Howland rejoined briefly.

"It's vengeance—the vengeance of the Moon Dragon through its agent, Pirut Shan. I haven't the faintest doubt that Pirut Shan staged this in order to get me," the engineer said. "I suppose he made sure to tell you that I was arguing fiercely with Maktu a couple of hours before he was found killed?"

"He said your quarrel had been overheard and offered about thirty witnesses," Howland replied dryly. "I didn't wait to hear what it was about, though."

Gilbert smiled grimly and jerked up his head. He looked straight at the British Commissioner out of fearless, steady eyes.

"You know, don't you, Howland, that the Temple of the Moon Dragon, up there in the hills, makes a practice of human sacrifices?"

"It is not permitted, of course," the commissioner frowned.

"But it is done. Oh, it's no reflection on you, Howland! The British Government's done all it could to prevent them and you've gone far beyond your instructions to stop it. But you can't change the course of human nature—especially in China."

Gilbert paused.

"My quarrel with Maktu was over that little Chinese boy, Kayo Chan, that I picked up at the dam one day and later adopted. The boy was marked at birth to be a sac-

rifice on the altar of the Moon Dragon before the moon sinks tonight!"

Howland gasped.

"Great heavens! That little kid? Is that what it's all about?"

"Pirut Shan came to get him today and I kicked him out of my house," Gilbert went on quickly. "Then I went to Maktu and told him that he and his absurd little temple and all of China could be damned and sizzle, but they couldn't have Kayo Chan." His eyes lit up suddenly. "Why, that kid's born to be a genius—not a sacrifice on the altar of ignorance. They'll slice *me* up alive before I'll let them touch him—governments, protectorates and creeds notwithstanding!"

"I don't blame you," Howland agreed gruffly. "But why didn't you come to me? I don't know what I could have done, but at least I represent the law."

"I know," Gilbert acknowledged. "It would have been useless, though. I thought of it. Instead of helping me, you'd have been forced to help them. Kayo Chan's father is an under-priest in the temple. You could have been made to force my release of the boy, don't you see?"

"But his father!" Howland exploded. "You mean his father knows of all this—sanctions it?"

"Why not?" Gilbert shrugged. "We're in China, not Piccadilly. It was Kayo Chan's father who marked him at birth; and the only answer I can give you for that is the answer all China gives you to any sort of a question, 'It is a custom.'"

There was a long silence. For the moment the body on the floor had been forgotten. The murder was no longer the predominant thought in the minds of the three white men. A deeper wrong had taken its place.

"Why have you fastened on to the kid so tightly, Gilbert?" Howland asked quietly, after a pause.

Gilbert shrugged.

"I'm fond of him, of course." His glance fell. "And then—oh, some time or other you must have felt the sensation of being trusted, confided in, by some one weaker—more helpless than you. Get me, Howland?"

Howland nodded.

"I—I think so." He touched the priest's body with his foot. "But what shall we do about this?"

Gilbert bent down and, overcoming his repugnance, drew the knife a little way out from its grim sheath. Under the hilt, at either side of the gash in the flesh, were little prong-like dents that had drawn only pin-pricks of blood. Gilbert drew a quick breath, but said nothing. He straightened slowly, his forehead creasing.

"I don't know," he said at length. "Do you want to place me under arrest?"

"Who committed the murder?"

"I don't know that, either. One thing is clear to me, though. My knife was placed there by Pirut Shan, whether he committed the deed or not." Gilbert smiled. "I guess it's up to you, Howland."

But Summerfield intervened.

"Not quite, gentlemen. You're needed for a bigger job than answering for Chink murders, Gilbert. The floods are coming down heavily from up above, and if the upper valley outlet isn't blown out, all the water's going to mass at the dam."

Howland whistled.

"That seems to settle the point. Your dam isn't strong enough to hold up under the floods yet. You'd better give me your parole, Gilbert."

"Thanks," Gilbert smiled. "I wanted to suggest it, Howland. You see, the valley outlet will give that water coming down a chance to escape down the slope without taxing the dam. Next spring we'll be able to laugh at the floods."

He turned to go, but Howland caught his arm. His face was very grave.

"Don't forget that this murder is still a serious thing for you, Gilbert. I don't need to tell you that I'll do all I possibly can for you, but Priest Maktu was important in his own little way and he'll be missed. Somebody's going to have to answer to his government and mine for his death."

Gilbert nodded.

"Thanks. I'll face anything, of course, if it's necessary, and I fully realize how

serious it is." He paused. "Howland, look that body over carefully. I don't believe my knife made the wound, and if I show you the knife that did you'll accept the evidence, won't you?"

"Only give me the chance!" Howland promised warmly.

Gilbert smiled easily, turning to his chief.

"Sorry to be dragging our crowd into such a mess, Summerfield," he began.

But his superior cut him short.

"We'll hear no more of that, Gilbert! I'd only ask for enough courage to do the same thing as you, in your place. My chief concern is in getting you out of it. Run along to your job. I'll follow in ten or fifteen minutes, but I must stop at our quarters first."

Gilbert came out of the old priest's house into the full radiance of a great silver moon, riding serene above an outflung bank of fleecy clouds among a million stars just over his head. The night was very still and the full, poignant beauty of the heavenly planet struck him with a strange sense of incongruity. Grimly he addressed it as he walked:

"You're beautiful, My Lady, but I wish you'd sink for tonight. Then I'd know Kayo Chan was safe for good and all."

Suddenly he halted and stood stockstill in his tracks. Another form had emerged from the bushes flanking the roadway and ranged along beside him. He stared down into the yellow eyes of Pirut Shan, priest of the Moon Dragon, gleaming like wolves' orbs above the fangs of a wolf in the hazy light.

"You are free, honorable American?" the priest said softly.

Gilbert's eyes narrowed.

"You are disappointed, Pirut Shan?"

"I believed in the white man's justice. Can you, then, commit murder and not be punished—if only your skin is white?"

"No!" Gilbert shook his head, replying as his enemy had spoken, in a mixture of the local dialect and cramped English. "I am not yet free, Pirut Shan. You did your work well."

The priest nodded slowly, as if in acceptance of the engineer's words.

"Only a fool blunders. I am not a fool. And it is my god's judgment that you pay."

"Say rather your judgment!" Gilbert shot out quickly. "It was you whom I scorned and insulted, Pirut Shan—not your god. And remember, I am not yet ended." He glanced upward at the moon. "So long as I am free until the moon sinks—for all your planning you will lose."

The priest caught his shoulder excitedly, turning him until they were facing each other in the deserted roadway. One long, skinny arm was outflung toward a spot in the hills that Gilbert knew for the location of the Moon-god's shrine. Something in the yellow man's intensity of bearing forced his attention.

"Hark to me, American," said Pirut Shan in his pidgin-English. "That temple up there in the rock cave has been for one, two, maybe three thousand years and it is still there." He paused dramatically. "Often the Moon Dragon has called for blood at the rising of his bride, the full moon. Often in those years has he called and has never been denied."

Silence. Gilbert looked down slowly. Pirut Shan was staring up at him with a hungry gleam in his yellow-balled eyes.

"I suppose you mean to threaten me," Gilbert said evenly.

But the priest shook his head.

"There must be blood spilt on the altar before the moon is dead tonight. It is the judgment of my god, the judgment thou hast sought to flout! But the blood shall be there—maybe more blood than you know, American!"

And with that sibilant menace left hanging in the air, Pirut Shan slipped away as mysteriously as he had appeared, into the shadows alongside the rough roadway. Gilbert thought he felt a chill breeze and shivered despite himself.

The fanatic had made his meaning clear enough. He, too, was marked for death. Gilbert felt again that it must have been Pirut Shan who had murdered the high priest, in order to implicate the man who had mortally insulted him and his god.

He moved on slowly, passing presently through the quiet rows of shacks built to

accommodate the coolie laborers at the dam. The men were all at the construction, awaiting his arrival.

Gilbert wanted to stop at his own quarters beyond to see that Kayo Chan was safe, but duty spurred him toward his unfinished task. The boy was well hidden and in half an hour or so the job would be done. Word had come late that the waters were rising fast in the hills and had prevented the blast by daylight. It was imperative that the thing be finished at once.

When he reached the hastily built shack serving him and Summerfield for their field office, he could see the water rising at a quite perceptible rate at the farther side of the unfinished dam. The builder in him sensed to the quick the increasing strain on weak timbers and the few incapable tons of concrete. Another hour and the work of fifteen months would be swept away like a child's mud fort in a rainstorm.

He nodded cheerily to his coolie gang foreman, who, since he had attained to his position with the Americans, styled himself Charlie Lee, as the latter came running up at his approach.

"You can place the charge right away, Charlie," he said brusquely. "Take as many men as you need and make it fast! I want to get this thing done."

"Yes, boss." Charlie grinned and trotted off in the direction of a gang of his men and his high-pitched voice was soon raised in staccato command. Gilbert saw him make off for the outlet half a mile away, the gang following, and each man loaded down with dynamite, nitro, or wire.

Gilbert stood alone. In the shadows of the long slope opposite him he made out one tiny pin-point of light. It was faint and barely more than a glimmer, but something sinister in its lonesome glow chilled him eerily.

A mile below lay his own home, beyond the ephemeral village of workers. He felt that he had hidden the boy well, but he was afraid. Pirut Shan would know the child was somewhere in the house, and if determined he would search desperately for him. Suppose he discovered the trap-door in the kitchen flooring?

He had sworn there would be a sacrifice at the altar tonight!

Charlie Lee's voice, raised in spluttering exhortation, drifted down on the clear air, and Gilbert caught sight of the little fellow's lantern zig-zagging crazily among the rocks near the upper valley outlet. He glanced at the dam. The waters were rising rapidly.

The cigarette he lit automatically recalled to his mind that he hadn't known what nerves were in years. But there was someing desperately ominous in the tense, oriental placidity of the night. The quiet was like the East—smooth and peaceful, yet swarming with an undercurrent of moving things, treachery and intrigue. And over his head hung the charge of murder.

How could it ever be proven that Pirut Shan had killed his own high priest? And Gilbert wasn't even certain in his own mind that he had. For what could his motive have been—beside ambition, and worldly ambition was outside the pale of the path he had chosen in life, supposedly.

Running footsteps startled him. He dashed his cigarette to the ground as Summerfield came up hurriedly, breathing laboriously from the climb. His eyes were wide and startled.

"What is it, chief?" demanded Gilbert, his suspicions aroused. "Tell me! Have they got the kid?"

Summerfield couldn't speak, for he had no breath to spare, but he nodded vociferously in answer. Gilbert swore between clenched teeth.

He looked up at the moon, fading slowly, and then at the tiny glimmer of light on that farther slope. He was no longer fearful of the night. His long frame stiffened with the call to action.

He pointed to where a small box, with mysterious brass buttons studding its top, lay in the center of a coil of wire at their feet.

"Charlie Lee's setting the charge at the outlet," he said quickly. "When he returns, press that first brass button. It sets off the explosion. That's all—I'm off!"

He waited for no reply. Summerfield watched his heavy shoulders disappear into

the shadows of the gully below the field office and then caught sight of him mounting the slope beyond, swinging upward with the aid of tree-trunks and branches—upward toward the little glow of light piercing the sentient darkness of the slope. He followed with his eyes as long as he could and breathed a little prayer when he could see no longer.

Gilbert approached the mouth of the cavern temple with the utmost caution, aware that he was weaponless and alone and that inside he would meet with enemies intent upon his life.

A passageway cavern jagged out of the rock spanned the twenty-odd feet separating the outdoors from the inner hollow that was the Temple of the Moon Dragon. This was for the time unguarded. As he entered stealthily, silence closed on Lane Gilbert's footsteps, shutting out his own world, while before his eyes loomed the hideous, misshapen image of the Moon Dragon.

The idol was the work of a master sculptor in some dead age, for it was intricately carved down to the littlest detail, the leering features finished out with scrupulous regard for minute effect and stained with unfading pigments, for they still bore the riotous colorings given them at birth.

Taller than a man stood, or squatted, the Moon Dragon, with claws for hands raised as if to hold up either side of his mammoth face, poised majestically atop the dais that was alone four feet above the rock floor.

Gilbert halted where the tunnel ended to get his bearings. The cavern was poorly lighted, the only illumination coming from two oil-soaked torches on either side of the idol. His eyes darted swiftly about the empty chamber, to fall at last in dull horror on a mass lying at the base of the statue.

At first he thought he had arrived too late, for blood was spattered red upon the stone steps and at the foot of the shrine, even as Pirut Shan had promised. And there was a figure there, quite still. Breathless with trepidation, Gilbert darted forward, too overcome with curiosity to remember caution.

The still body lay on a great tray at the idol's base, built just for its present burden. And it lay as Maktu had lain, the silken priest's robes torn away from the breast and shoulders where the strange steel pierced the flesh. The odd weapon was buried to the hilt, too.

The dead man's face was pale and relaxed, as though the hand that had guided the knife had paid up its debts on earth first, and Gilbert started in excitement as he recognized almost instantly the deep resemblance of the fixed features to those of the boy he had come to save, Kayo Chan.

At once the situation became clarified. Bending over, he drew the knife a scant two inches from its wound. He exclaimed exultantly and softly, for two prongs were on the under side of the hilt and there were marks beside this wound similar to those he had discovered in Maktu's flesh. This knife, then, had committed both deeds.

Gilbert whirled, straightening instinctively at a sound from behind him, a sibilant intake of breath that aroused him to immediate danger. He had heard no one approach, but he braced himself—and looked into the yellow eyes of Pirut Shan.

"Ah, Pirut Shan," he whispered tensely, and waited.

The priest inclined his head. Gilbert caught the gleam of naked steel half-hidden by the robe he wore and two more men lurking in the shadows behind him. Pirut Shan's mirthless smile was an ominous threat.

He gestured toward the body at the base of the idol.

"You see, American, that the sacrifice has been made," he said softly.

Gilbert nodded.

"This man died by his own hand to pay for his own crime. Where is his son?" he demanded suddenly.

The priest was startled.

"His son!" Then he smiled again, evilly, with his yellow fangs and bloodless lips. "His son," he repeated. "The moon has not yet sunk. And I told you once tonight that much blood might be spilt at that shrine."

Gilbert caught the unhidden menace in the words, but he showed no sign of fear.

He was standing just under the idol and facing the priest and his men.

"I came for the boy, Pirut Shan," he said steadily. "Don't talk to me with threats. My friends know where I am—I warn you!"

Pirut Shan shook his head slowly.

"It is known you have already meddled in our affairs. You have killed our high priest and your friends know you have come here now. There on the altar lies another of our brothers; who can say who has killed him? Surely, your friends would not deny us our vengeance."

Gilbert started in alarm. He felt suddenly all the careful, secret planning that his enemy had done. And he was trapped. His eyes darted about the cavern, but there was no escape and no sign of Kayo Chan.

The priest's breath hissed between his teeth.

"Prepare to die, American. The time for words is past!" he whispered tensely, and turned to his men with a low exclamation that was like a hiss.

Gilbert crouched. From three directions his assailants came and bare blades gleamed thirstily in the weird yellow light.

He dove forward and down, like a football tackle. The others came together in a tangled heap, tripped either by their own impetus or his attack.

He turned swiftly, fists clenched, determined at least to die hard. For split-seconds Pirut Shan halted his attack while he called upon the gods he knew for justification.

"Vengeance!" he shouted in his shrill voice, his mad eyes gleaming with the fire of fanaticism. "I call for thy judgment, oh Dragon God of the Moon!"

And, like an answer to his invocation, the hillside trembled in a violent convulsion as the blast at the outlet blew off and tore away two hundred tons of earth and rock from the upper outlet. The ground heaved like the breast of a giant in a spasm. Gilbert was thrown forward on his face in the farthest corner of the cavern and pinned there under a heap of fallen earth and rock from overhead.

But the throne of the Moon Dragon was tottering. Ere the first deafening detonation of the blast had subsided the image itself had been ripped asunder down its center and the left half, splitting, crashed downward.

As it fell, drowning out in that tiny space with the sound of its fall even the echo of the blast, Pirut Shan and his men were obliterated. Not a sound came from them, nor a sign. They had vanished.

Gilbert struggled in vain to free himself. A glad cry from the altar, where only half the idol still stood in hideously grinning futility, made him look up. Kayo Chan stood there, revealed by the fall of part of the image, inside which, by means of some ingenious contrivance, he had been imprisoned. The boy was clad in the blood-red silk of the sacrifice.

"Kayo Chan!" Gilbert cried joyfully as the boy ran forward to take his outstretched hands. "Stick close, partner; we're both safe and we'll be out of this hole as soon as my friends arrive."

"Who is that man who killed himself?" Kayo Chan demanded, the eternal child in him accepting the miracle that had just occurred as his own special dispensation. "He called me his son and then put the knife in his breast even as he embraced me."

Gilbert couldn't move because of the dirt and refuse piled on his back, but he pressed the boy's hands and smiled grimly and contentedly.

"He must have been off his head, old-timer. But be sure you remember what he said to you when Mr. Howland gets here." The remainder of his discourse was beyond Kayo Chan. "I guess when Howland hears that and stops to notice those funny prongs in the knife, he'll realize that old Priest Maktu was killed by a man who discovered that he was a father before he was a priest, after all."

The Haunted Hotel

By JOE BURKE

PART TWO

CHAPTER SIX

OUTSIDE the crickets sang their nightly autumn chorus, and the frogs in the meadow were croaking a stident discord. So still was the stuffy, darkened room that the ticking of the watch in the detective's waistcoat pocket was plainly audible.

Suddenly every nerve in his body was alert, tense. His hands under the covering gripped his revolver and flashlight. As the clock struck two a slight squeaking noise came out of the gloom from somewhere beyond where he lay. Donnelly's steely eyes strove to penetrate the darkness and he presently discerned a crouching form. As the figure crossed a beam of moonlight that shone through the lone window, the detective noted a glitter of steel in the hand of the intruder.

"Armed," he muttered.

The startling idea flashed into his mind that the intruder was a crook ready to kill if opposed.

The detective's finger was taut on the trigger of his hidden revolver as the marauder glided to the bedside and stood towering over him. A match scratched, and the heat from the flame fanned his face. Then the prowler spoke in guttural accents:

"Not—him! How—much—longer?"

"No, it isn't *him,*" cried Donnelly, hurling the bed-covering from him, and sitting erect. "And, you dirty crook, you won't have to wait another second *longer!*"

His automatic was boring into the midriff of the stunned thief, the flashlight's powerful gleam illuminating his whole body.

"Stick 'em up! Lively now," the Boston investigator snapped, swinging his feet to the floor and forcing the man back. "Let that gat drop on the bed! That's right! Now put these on, then I'll look you over."

Without relaxing his vigilance, Donnelly pulled forth a pair of handcuffs and dropped them on the bed. The captive, having no option in the matter, reluctantly snapped them on his wrists.

Standing erect, the detective forced his prisoner to the wall where the gas-bracket was. He snapped off his flashlight as the gas flared up under a lighted match.

"Well, you're some comedy in that make-up," taunted Donnelly, his cold, gray eyes roaming over the ragged, seemingly malformed creature cowering before him. He certainly was a repulsive sight. His face and head were covered with a mop of tangled hair. His clothes were torn and ill-fitting, but were void of the filthy, dank odor that the first two victims spoke of in their description of the nocturnal visitor. When Donnelly's eyes rested on the manacled hands of his prisoner, he smiled broadly. With a quick movement he snatched some false whiskers from his prisoner's face.

"Just as I thought when I noticed that missing part of the little finger of your right hand," said the detective, raising the handcuffed digits. "When did you get out of Sing Sing, Dummy?"

The prisoner grinned and shook his head with a manner that matched his sobriquet.

"Just as you say," Donnelly grinned back. "You never was much for talking, but this time you're coming through, or I'm going to send you up for life for robbery while armed. Get me? Who's the brains of this fizzled coup? It ain't you, I'll swear; you never had any brains."

The officer's threat of a life term in

prison had a telling effect on the thief with the mute moniker, for his face blanched, and he looked at the detective appealingly.

"You know, Mr. Donnelly, that I never was a snitcher," he said in a low whisper out of the corner of his mouth, a habit acquired when convicts have served many, or long sentences in jails, "an' you know that your third degree won't make me, either! But what gets me is, how did you get here? Who sent for you? I'd like t' drop dead when you spoke. Was it Drake?"

Detective Donnelly knew men of Dummy Shane's profession. The crook was a "tool"—a soft yap who would commit any crime if it were laid out for him. He would double-blank for a super-crook, didn't pause at strong-arm stuff and, in fact, his "crafts" were many.

But he was crowned by the underworld denizens as the King of Silence. A snitcher—or pigeon-stool—was an outcast by virtue of his treachery, and very often a knife or a bullet would find its way into some part of his traitorous anatomy.

Dummy was most always the "goat" when a capture was made. Meek as the Biblical Moses, he had often taken his stretch in silence, while the master-minds whose work he did would make merry on the profits.

Donnelly knew all this, and for the past year or more he had been affiliated with the local police of the big cities in rounding up a gang of thieves who had been stealing everything movable. The "brains" of the outfit was the one they were after, the one man they wanted most. He was still at large. Might not Dummy tell who he was?

Donnelly thrilled at the thought. Thus far not a soul in the house had been disturbed. The officer looked into the wrinkled face of his prisoner. Father Time and long terms within grim, stone walls were taking their toll. All Dummy's youth had fled.

"You're getting old, Dummy," said the detective not unkindly, "and you bid fair to end your days in prison. Do you ever stop to think that you've been the 'goat' long enough? Do you? What has LeBlanch got against you? It was he who framed you."

The random stab shot home. Dummy Shane became animated and his faded eyes blazed with fury.

"LeBlanch?" he choked, his manacled hands straining in their steel bands. "Did he put you wise to me? Did he, the d—— rat? Well, Mr. Donnelly," he snarled out the much-coveted information, "would you be pleased to know that Pere LeBlanch is no other than Count D'Argent, the notorious leader of the Paris Apaches who was exiled from France! Yes, sir! He's the guy that's been furnishing the brains for our gang. He put me onto this game on a twenty per cent rake-off. He tried to frame me, did he? I'll fix him——"

The roar of a revolver dispatching its leaden missile of death was the termination of the unfortunate crook's tricked-into disclosure. As his body crashed to the floor, blood spattering his face and upper garments, the detective whirled, and through the haze of powder-smoke looked in the satanic visage of the Frenchman! LeBlanch stood framed in the open doorway, a formidable looking revolver held fixedly in his right hand.

"Monsieur Donnelly will please raise his hands," he purred. "Monsieur is losing his cleverness. While you laugh in that peeg's face, and he tell you that Pere LeBlanch is the famous Count D'Argent, I keel the traitor! What Dummy Shane tell you, Monsieur Donnelly, will do you no good. I keel you next, and who will know?"

"Samuel Drake will know, you murderer," said the detective, without a tremor in his voice.

He knew he was face to face with sure death unless something short of a miracle happened in the next few moments. He knew the nature of the banished leader of the worst gang of cut-throats in all of Europe.

"Monsieur Drake is powerless to help," sneered D'Argent. "I tie him up downstairs."

The sneer faded from his face and a wolf-like snarl supplanted it. His ratty eyes were mere pin-points as he slowly raised the revolver on the level with the detective's heart.

Donnelly was fully aware of his peril. The

space between him and the murderous Frenchman was too great for a thousand-to-one chance to jump him. There was only one chance, and an old one at that. Older by far than the ancient mansion in which the grim tragedy was being enacted.

The detective smiled. His steely, gray eyes were not looking into D'Argent's face; they were looking over his head.

"That's one time, D'Argent, that you failed to tie your prisoner up tight," smiled the Boston sleuth. "Get him, Drake!"

The Frenchman spun about with the speed of a panther. Detective Donnelly's hand dropped like lightning, his automatic barking and the bullet tearing the murderer's gun from his hand.

"Gee, D'Argent," whistled Donnelly, snapping a pair of handcuffs on the cowed ex-Apache's wrists, "but that was a close squeak. And I thought you were clever."

CHAPTER SEVEN

LESS than an hour later the detective and Samuel Drake were seated in the hotel office. The Frenchman, LeBlanch, had been removed to jail by the local police, and the body of Dummy Shane, his victim, was taken away by order of the county coroner. Drake was none the worse for his brief trussing-up, and was seemingly relieved at the turn of affairs.

"How'd D'Argent get you?" Donnelly asked him, settling back in his chair and puffing serenely on a fragrant cigar.

"He came sneaking into my room, and before I was aware of his intention he had me covered with his gun. Then he tied me up."

Donnelly laughed as he knocked the ashes from his Havana.

"Well, I think that clears up the mystery, Sam," he said. "Dummy Shane was the tool and your former partner was the brains. He worked the old superstition about the ghost of the hunchback Titus who died over seventeen years ago. Clever trick, but he overdid it. Got too greedy. Those day-time jobs were too rank."

Samuel Drake was thoughtful for a moment before he spoke. The other puffed away in silence, unmindful of the proprietor's puzzled expression.

"But—Ed," Drake ventured rather reluctantly. "The difference in the—the thief's actions. The first couple of times he never made any attempt to rob or molest his victims. And there's the filthy smell that they specially mentioned. Dummy Shane's clothes—although ragged and old—there was no noticeable offensive odor from them. How do you account for it?"

Detective Donnelly slowly sat erect and removed his cigar. He idly flicked the ashes from its glowing end, then laid it in an ash-tray on the desk.

"Now that you mention it, Sam," he declared as he puckered his lips, "they don't dovetail very well, do they? The crook did not rob his victims first off, to impress the ghost scare good and plenty on your imagination and keep the cops from getting too nosey. The smelly clothes—there was nothing to that, old man—your guests were scared pink and imagined it."

"But, Donnelly," blurted out the Goodwill Inn proprietor, springing to his feet and pacing the floor, "tell me, how the devil did he get into the rooms?"

The ex-headquarters man uttered something in his throat that sounded much like an oath, unlimbered his crossed legs, and stood up.

"By gad, you're right, Sam," he confessed. "I never thought of that! I'm slipping, old friend; I'll have to step aside soon for the younger ones. I'll go down to the jail and have a talk with the Frenchman. I know how *he* got in, but Dummy—that's the rub."

His interview with the murderer was futile. D'Argent laughed in his face.

"Monsieur gendarme is getting old," he taunted sneeringly. "Ask the dead peeg, Dummy Shane."

Somewhat disgusted, the detective returned to the Inn and reported his failure. After several hours of diligent search of the rooms where the outrages were committed, and finding not a single clue to the mysterious entrance, the only solution they could

agree on was: there was *some* hidden means of access which was not perceivable to the naked eye. Only the razing of the old mansion would disclose it, and that was not to be thought of. The menace had been effaced, so why worry about secret passages?

Thus matters stood the day following, when the Boston sleuth pocketed his fee, shook hands with Drake, and took an early train for the "Hub."

CHAPTER EIGHT

UNDER the blistering sun in far-off India, beneath a white-topped tent which seemed to wither in the pitiless glare, a man lay on a crude cot tossing with fever. The sufferer's sunken eyes looked appealingly into the austere, sun-baked face of the grizzly veteran gazing down on him, licked his fever-parched lips and asked weakly:

"What's my chances of pulling through, doctor? I know my campaigning days are over, but I do want to live till I get back to the States."

The old army surgeon shook his head doubtfully as he raised a limp hand of the stricken man and consulted his watch.

"You've been a brave and fearless soldier, Captain David Titus," commended the doctor, pocketing his watch and lowering the sufferer's wasted hand gently back on the coverlet, "and I know that you'll not flinch at the truth. Your wounds and privations have sapped your vitality to such an ebb that you are bordering on a state of tuberculosis. This fever, which will abate within a few hours, has pronounced your doom! I'm going to order your removal to England, and if you survive the trip I think you'll be able to make a journey to the States. But, Captain Titus, I strongly advise against it unless the trip is imperative. In England, with good care, you may live several months. A trip to the States will be the end, I fear."

Captain Titus sighed deeply as he moistened his dry lips with a cooling draught tendered by the doctor. The hectic flush beneath his sunken, bronzed cheeks slowly faded. He smiled wanly.

"It is imperative, in a sense, doctor," the stricken soldier declared sadly. "I must learn the truth of something about which I've been in doubt of for many years. I have been haunted by the spirit of one whom I've believed dead, one whom I loved second to my dear, departed mother, one who seems to—if in the world beyond—want to communicate with me—my poor, unfortunate brother."

Then he briefly sketched his family history.

The army surgeon listened in silence to the other's tale of how his hunchback brother was left in the care of his stepfather, the disappearance of the stepparent, and now the irresistible call back home—the home now shadowed by a mantle of tragedies.

"A strange story," remarked the doctor bluntly, laying a hand on the captain's forehead. "I fear those dreams are not true, but are fancies incited by the mystical atmosphere of your environments. The doctrines of the natives of India, you well know, are rather occult and eery. Gets into one's blood. But, nevertheless," he said, turning and beckoning to an orderly, "you're going home as fast as I can send you."

CHAPTER NINE

THE winter was well advanced and transient guests at the Goodwill Inn were few and far between. Thus far the snowstorms of the season had been light, and all roads running by the inn were passable. Samuel Drake was loath to close the place until spring, reopening it again with the coming of the tourist season.

With the passing-out of Dummy Shane, and the sentence to life imprisonment meted out to his murderer, it looked possible that the "ghost" of the hostelry had been laid. Proprietor Drake sat nodding behind the desk, the warm glow from the stove near at hand lulling him into the restful arms of Morpheus.

As the purr of a motor and grinding of gears rose above the sighing, biting winds, he sat erect and blinked. The next moment the door was thrown open, and amidst a flurry of light snow a muffled figure strode inside and up to the desk.

Samuel Drake stood up, smiled a greeting, then turned the register-book toward the newcomer.

Ignoring the mute salutation the newcomer turned down his coat-collar, divested his hands of the heavy driving-gloves he was wearing, then with a bold, flourishing hand wrote the name:

"Stillman Hillson, San Francisco, Calif."

The man blotting the ink-inscribed name of Dave and Paul Titus's stepfather was not the handsome, debonair fashion-plate of nearly a score of years before. Time and dissipation had left their mark. His hair, spare on top, was now snow-white. His face was haggard, eyes faded and sunken; but even in their loss of luster a cruel gleam still lingered. His clothes were neat, but ill-fitting and of an inferior texture. All in all, his appearance bespoke the ravages of an ill-spent life.

"How many days are you going to stay, Mr. Hillson?" inquired Drake, swinging the book around and poising the pen to record.

"Just tonight," growled Hillson, averting the hotelman's resentful glance at the curt response. "I'll take the room above the office, if it isn't occupied. It's quieter, and I'm starting on a long journey tomorrow."

Drake looked at the speaker sharply. Then he asked slowly:

"Ever stop here before?"

The newcomer laughed. There was no merriment in that laugh. It grated.

"Once or twice," he answered bitterly. "Do I get that room?"

Samuel Drake made no reply. He entered against his name on the book Room 5. Selecting a key from the rack behind him, he shoved it across the open book to a porter who was waiting with the newly arrived guest's suitcase in his hand.

All night, and till dawn broke in the east, the wind moaned and shrieked through the trees, the swirling, white flakes twisting and curling like mythical whips about the somber old mansion.

Goodwill Inn was astir, and the appetizing odor of ham and eggs was assailing the nostrils of the few guests awaiting breakfast, when a powerful automobile plowed through a huge snowdrift under the archway and glided to a pause before the entrance. A uniformed driver sat behind the wheel; in the tonneau were two men.

Hardly had the chauffeur applied the emergency brake when they both sprang out and hurried inside.

"Where's the boss?" demanded one, intercepting a porter who was hurrying out to bring in their baggage. "There's no bags coming in, son, 'cause we're not going to stay. Dig up the boss, and make it snappy."

The speaker was a giant, and there was no denying the note of authority in his order. His partner, no pygmy himself, glared at the porter as he went in quest of Drake, who soon made his appearance.

"I'm the *boss*," announced the Inn proprietor stiffly. "What do you wish to see me for, gentlemen?"

"We are members of the State Police," came the startling answer from the ponderous spokesman, "and we have tracked a murderer to this place! The guy we are after killed a man in Springfield. He shot him to death in a quarrel over a card game. Detectives traced him to the Coast and back East again. Last night we got word that he was in this State, and we have reasons to believe that he arrived here last night in a stolen car. His name is Stillman Hillson!"

"Stillman Hillson," gasped Drake, somewhat aghast to think that beneath his roof there was hidden a fugitive murderer. "Yes, officers, there was a man registered here late last night, who signed his name Stillman Hillson. I put him in Room 5 on the floor above."

Gingerly the two policemen mounted a flight of stairs to the floor designated and tiptoed to the door numbered 5. With drawn guns they listened. Then one knocked softly. There was no response. He knocked again, this time with the butt of his heavy revolver. Still no sound from within.

The trio exchanged glances. Then the big policeman spoke:

"You're sure he didn't check out this morning?"

"I'll swear he didn't," assured Drake, to whom the interrogation was put. He turned the knob as he spoke, then added: "The door is locked!"

On investigation they also discovered that the key was in the lock. A chair was next procured and the larger officer climbed atop of it and peered through the transom.

"He's in there lying on the floor," he whispered, stepping down lightly.

When the door crashed inward under the forcible impact of the powerful man-hunters they found, in a huddled, shapeless mass, the body of Stillman Hillson on the floor beside the bed, dead!

One glance was enough to show them that he had been a victim of violence. Marks on his face and semi-nude body denoted that the crime was the work of a madman. Livid marks on the victim's throat, the swollen tongue protruding from his gaping mouth, were grim evidence of the murderer's strangling hands. The face and chest were scratched and torn.

The smaller officer raised one of the slain man's tightly clenched hands and, forcing apart the rigid fingers, extracted a bunch of matted, dirty hair.

"The hairy hunchback," cried Samuel Drake. He recoiled with aversion as the State policemen arose and stood before him. The one who held the gruesome find in his hand winked at his partner and asked:

"What do you mean—hairy hunchback? Come across with any information that will help us. There's been murder committed here, and although the victim was wanted for murder also, that don't let the bird out that kicked him off. What do you know about it?"

Then Drake told them the whole story, portions of which were already known by the officers. At the conclusion of the strange tale the man-hunters laughed outright.

"That's a good one on Ed Donnelly," the huge one chuckled. "First time I ever knew him to fall down on anything he set out to clear up. Well, we'll be going," was his sober announcement, nodding to his partner, "and we'll also report this to the town police and notify the coroner. And as for you, Drake"—the crow-feet at the tails of his eyes bespoke suppressed merriment—"you'd better send for Donnelly and tell him to finish his job."

Samuel Drake did send for Detective Donnelly. Although he could plainly spell the word "finish" to the future of the Goodwill Inn, there was just enough American fighting spirit in the little hotel proprietor to make him stick to his "guns" until he had unearthed the mysterious menace which had ruined his business and nearly his whole nervous system.

"I'm going to run it another month, Ed"—he apprised the Boston investigator on his arrival—"regardless of loss. I want you to stick around. Poke around. Look around. Do anything you d—— please, but find that unwholesome, murderous beast! Gad, Ed," he shuddered, "I actually fear for my own safety."

CHAPTER TEN

THE days which followed were uneventful. The hostelry was tenantless at night, and during the day was the cynosure of many eyes who were attracted to it by the lure of its notoriety.

Detective Donnelly was not idle. Neither was he hopeful, but he remained circumspect at all times. Samuel Drake fretted and fumed under the strain, secretly watching for the calendar dates for the termination of his ultimatum to hold the "fort" for a month.

Two days before the time set for his departure Samuel Drake was aroused from some minor duty he was performing by the purr of an automobile motor and voices from without.

Before he could respond to the call the door was pushed open and three men entered. The man on the right was in the uniform of a chauffeur. The man on the left was tall and straight as a young pine.

He was attired in clothes of English make. His face was tanned to the hue of copper. But it was the figure in the middle that the proprietor of the Goodwill Inn stared at.

At first glance he fancied he was looking into the face of a corpse. The men flanking him on each side were holding his emaciated body from sagging to the floor. His face, like that of one of his attendants, was also bronzed, even though it was shrunken and clung to the bones like a dried piece of parchment. His eyes were hollow and expressionless, and one vested with a physician's knowledge could see death lurking in their depths.

"I am Captain David Titus of the Sixth Dragoons, His Majesty's service, late of India," the sick man proclaimed, with a show of dignity. He was seated in a chair in the lobby, the tall attendant standing respectfully at his side.

Samuel Drake started and stared at the speaker. What new menace was about to involve itself in the profound mystery which had blasted the name of his hotel? The dying man seated before him, he knew, was the soldier heir of the Titus estate. Drake had learned the identity of Stillman Hillson since he was found murdered in Room 5. What was this middle-aged, white-haired, dying English officer doing at the Haunted Hotel when he should be in a hospital? Then recovering himself, Drake smiled and tendered his hand.

"I am glad to know you, Captain Titus," he said as he pressed the limp, cold hand which the sick man placed in his, "and I hope your home-coming will repair your health. You will no doubt benefit by the environment and memories of your boyhood days, not counting the good you will derive from the healthful atmosphere of this place."

Captain Titus smiled sadly and shook his head. He withdrew his hand from the proprietor's hearty grasp and brushed it across his eyes. For the first time Drake noted that the other hung helpless at his side. Then Captain Titus spoke huskily:

"Thank you, Mr. Drake—I learned your name from my legal solicitor in London—but I didn't come here to get well. That can never be. God in His mercy has spared me that I might answer a call that has haunted me day and night for many years. The call of my flesh and blood! The mute call of one I loved, equal only to the love I bore my mother, the love for my crippled, unfortunate brother! That's why I'm here, Mr. Drake. To learn the truth. My stepfather—damn him—telegraphed me that he died. I want to learn if Hillson killed him! Tonight I'll sleep in the room where my saintly mother died, and tomorrow I will visit Paul's grave."

His dramatic flow of oratory ended in a fit of spasmodic coughing which shook his whole wasted frame. His tall attendant bent over him and pressed a bottle of colored liquid to his lips. After several seconds the spasm passed and he lay back panting. He turned his burning eyes up to his attendant, saying in a whisper:

"The night is nearly here, corporal; assist me to the room over the office, then you——"

A gasp from Drake interrupted.

"The—room—over—the—office?" he jerked out in monosyllables.

"Why, yes, Mr. Drake," said Captain Titus, glancing up slowly. "Why? Anything wrong with that room?"

"Oh, no, captain," hurriedly explained the proprietor. "Only a guest—er—died in there a week or more ago."

"Oh, is that all," said Titus testily, turning again to the tall attendant. "Help me to the room."

Twilight had faded into darkness. The heir to the Titus estate and his companions had been served their dinners in Room 5, after which Samuel Drake held a conference with Detective Donnelly, and it was agreed that the latter was to keep a strict watch on the new arrivals.

Unperceived, while Drake engaged them in conversation pertaining to the captain's plans for the morrow, the detective bored a hole through the wall which divided Room 5 from a room adjoining. In that circular opening he inserted a small but powerful telescope.

Shortly after nine o'clock Donnelly took up his watch at his improvised billet of ob-

servation. All was still within, except the laborious breathing of the sick man.

Another hour passed as the detective sat nodding in the chair, then an angry challenge from within Room 5 brought him up standing.

"Who goes there, and what do you want?" were the words snapped out sharply. "Stop where you are or I'll blow you apart."

Detective Donnelly's eye was glued to the miniature telescope and he tried to see what was taking place in the semi-darkness of the room beyond. As his eye grew more accustomed to the gloom he could hardly suppress a gasp of astonishment.

"The hairy hunchback," he thrilled. The tableau which he saw magnified before his staring eye was sending his hot blood racing madly through his veins. It was the thrill of the hunter when he had doggedly stalked his quarry for hours, days, and maybe weeks, then sees it within his grasp.

In the room beyond, his tall, straight figure casting a drawn-out shadow across the light from the heavens, stood Captain Titus' attendant. In one hand he held firmly a huge army revolver. Before a gaping hole in the farther wall crouched a malformed, bestial, unkempt thing whose burning eyes were like pools of simmering hate.

The sick man on the bed moaned and turned his head. His eyes opened slowly and stared. With a painful effort he arose to a sitting position and from his thin lips burst the name:

"Paul!"

When the detective rushed into the room the attendant was standing with bowed head, the hand which held the revolver hanging limply at his side. The filthy, disfigured form was kneeling beside the bed. Captain Titus was crooning over him, and stroking his tangled mop of dirty hair. The English officer looked up at the detective.

"Who are you, sir, and why do you intrude on my privacy?" he demanded. "Show that person out, corporal, and call Mr. Drake."

"Don't need to call Drake," the detective apprised him. "And you stay where you are," he growled to the attendant who had started to execute his master's bidding. "I'm a detective who has been hired by Mr. Drake to solve a string of mysteries that has been keeping this house on tenterhooks for months. I've found the culprit. This man is my prisoner!" he finished, drawing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and stepping to the side of the kneeling hunchback.

"Stop," cried the English officer, raising a thin hand in protest. "This is my brother Paul. He has done no harm, but has been cruelly wronged! I thought him dead, but instead he has been living here and suffering the pangs of hell itself! Leave us; I haven't much longer to live, and poor Paul, I feel, will soon follow."

"Leave nothing," thundered Donnelly, now fully aroused. "This thing here is wanted for murder! And the man he killed was his stepfather!"

Captain Titus uttered a groan and fell back on the bed gasping. The kneeling figure whined piteously, and kissed repeatedly the wasted hand of his brother.

"Is that true, Paul?" he implored.

Paul Titus bowed his shaggy head slowly and sank to the floor and lay still.

Detective Donnelly started forward, but a detaining hand on his arm stopped him. He turned to see Samuel Drake at his side.

"Easy, Ed," he cautioned mildly. "Take my roadster, speed to the village and bring back Dr. Kidder with you."

"But my prisoner," protested the Boston sleuth. "I can't leave him unguarded."

Captain Titus raised thankful eyes to the proprietor. He smiled his mute gratitude, then turned his gaze on Donnelly.

"Mr. Drake is right, officer," he said with pained effort. "Please go and bring a doctor. My brother, I fear, will never answer to mortal judge for what you've termed as murder. I say it was justice! Will you take my word as a soldier and a gentleman that I will be responsible for my brother until the doctor arrives, and I can clear up this horrible mystery? Will you, sir?"

The detective dropped his imperious manner like a discarded garment, straightened out his six feet three inches and squared his massive shoulders.

"Yes, Captain Titus, I will," he answered

briskly, then added with a tinge of regret: "I'm sorry, sir, if I've been a little too arrogant; but duty is duty."

The next moment he was gone. The roar of a motor a few minutes later told of his departure for the doctor.

The soldier attendant and Samuel Drake left the room at Captain Titus' request. Then the poor, misshapened wretch poured out in guttural, incoherent sentences the whole of his pitiful story.

Dr. Kidder opened the door of Room 5 and closed it softly behind him. His long, bearded face was grave as he moved slowly toward the waiting group standing a respectable distance away.

"Captain Titus wants to see you, Donnelly," he made known, "and he's got a strange tale to tell. I fear you won't take his brother along as a prisoner, for he has only a very few minutes to live. I found him suffering from exposure, starvation, a fractured skull and blood poisoning! How any man in his condition lived as long as he did is beyond my medical knowledge. Captain Titus is close to the end, so don't excite him while he tells you the story that will clear up the whole mystery. Go in."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PROPPED up in the bed, his brother lying nearly lifeless beside him, Captain Titus made his explanations in a faint but clear voice.

After he sailed for England, leaving his brother Paul in the care of his stepfather, he heard nothing more from the States till he was in India. There he got a cablegram of his brother's death, which stated that a Dr. Cook was the attending physician. His grief was great, but a soldier on active service has no time to mourn for lost ones. Then the next news he received was from his solicitor in London. He cabled that his stepfather had collected his share of the estate and left for parts unknown. That was his story. His brother's followed with more startling facts.

After the death of his mother, and the departure of his brother Dave, the semi-demented Paul was nearly heartbroken. We will pass over the harrowing details of the beating and privation he endured at the hands of Stillman Hillson. Then a stranger came to the house. His step-parent called him Dr. Cook. He was kind to the deformed creature, who dog-like craved fair treatment.

Shortly after the doctor's arrival, after a tasty lunch at which some coffee was drunk, Paul become unconscious. When he recovered from the coma state he found himself a prisoner in a secret warren beneath the house. Food was brought by a masked unknown, who placed it within his reach and hurried away.

At that time the unfortunate boy was possessed of superhuman strength, and a knowledge of the secret passages in the old mansion. He finally used his knowledge of these secret passages to escape. By pressing a hidden spring a square stone revolved, disclosing an opening into a small, cell-like room. Inside that room were several small recesses in which a narrow stairway led to every room in the house.

All this the unfortunate cripple knew, as he had discovered them in his aimless wanderings about the house when a boy. When he finally burst his bonds and rushed through the house it was deserted. He was alone. And so he existed for nearly seventeen years, living in the underground warren like a mole, living on what he could steal from the neighboring crops and game when it could be snared.

He suffered, but fought to live for revenge to kill the man who brought this added misfortune on him.

Then came the day when the old mansion was again inhabited. From a secret tunnel he could command a view of every person that registered at the desk. But his sight was failing and he would visit the room in which the guests were assigned and view them by the light of matches.

One day, after he had nearly frightened the life out of the guests, he was crawling up the secret stairs when he thought he heard a step behind him. Discerning another guest registering, he hurried to a room

above to get a supply of matches which were always obtainable in the rooms.

Then he returned to his subterranean abode. To his surprise the stone entrance stood wide open! Warily he thrust his head through to see who opened it, when he was attacked by Count D'Argent, alias Pere LeBlanch.

Caught unawares, a heavy furnace shaker nearly crushing his head in, he was an easy victim to the wiry Frenchman's attack. The crafty Frenchman, after the former visits of the malformed Titus, and having learned some of the history of the old mansion, concluded to watch, and if what he suspected was true he meant to turn it into unlawful profit. The result is already known. He had followed the semi-demented creature, discovered the secret spring, then hired one of his puppets to rob a guest under the guise of the phantom intruder.

The Frenchman also tied up his helpless victim and fed him regularly. Then came the killing of Dummy Shane, the imprisonment of his murderer, and peace again settled over the old mansion.

Racked with excruciating pains from his fractured skull, the unfortunate wretch released himself shortly after LeBlanch's arrest.

Thus matters stood when the dying cripple crawled up the hidden stairway the night of the arrival of Stillman Hillson, the one person whom he most desired to see before he died—the man whose life he felt he must take with his last ounce of waning strength.

That night he crept to his stepfather's room and strangled him. Then he stole back to his underground warren to die. As his crushed soul was slowly, but surely, slipping into the Great Unknown, there came a voice from out of his childhood past. The voice of one he loved—his brother Dave.

Again he made his painful journey. Step by step, foot by foot, he dragged his tortured body up the hidden stairs until he met his boyhood playmate.

"That's the story, gentlemen," Captain Titus sighed weakly, stroking the matted hair of the inert creature beside him. "A cruel wrong, which cannot be righted on this earth, had been done my brother. Although I regret that he must die with the brand of crime on his soul, I feel that his suffering will be atonement enough."

The heir to the Titus estate closed his eyes and remained quiet for several moments. Tears trickled from beneath his closed lids and coursed slowly down his tanned, sunken cheeks. Slowly he opened his eyes and gazed steadily into the cold, gray orbs of the detective.

"Mr. Donnelly," he said, "you have been a very human officer. My brother and I are at this moment walking in the valley of the shadows. With the coming of another sun we will have found the light. Leave him in my care until the sun has risen once more from behind the distant hills—then you can——"

Donnelly whirled on his heel and left the room.

Two days later the last of the Tituses were laid in their graves.

(THE END)

"LIFERS" THE MOST RELIABLE PRISONERS

LEWIS E. LAWES, warden of Sing Sing, said recently that murderers serving life sentences are the most reliable men in prison and that capital punishment does not deter crime. In an address at the Union Methodist Church in West Forty-eighth street Mr. Lawes contended his prison experience had taught him that many persons do not fear death and that consequently the electric chair does not frighten them sufficiently to prevent them from committing murder. Referring to "lifers," he said:

"As far as the control of these prisoners is concerned I believe that all wardens are a unit in agreeing that they constitute, as a group, the most reliable men in the institution."

Saving the Sheriff a Job

By A. LENARD

A PASSER-BY would not have taken the lone traveler in the old dilapidated car to be a murderer, a thief, or an old-time bootlegger. But, disguised as he was in blue denim, one would have mistaken him for a worker on his way to his job.

It was plain to be seen that he was timorous and very nervous, but he was getting all the mileage he could, and getting it just as quickly as the old car could deliver it. A search of the man's pockets would have revealed an army automatic, a supply of ammunition and a neatly folded current issue of the daily paper. The front page contained an account of a murder and a picture of the murderer, taken from the reproduction of a photograph filed in the rogues' gallery.

But because Joe Coogaine's picture was in the rogues' gallery was no reason to believe that he was a hardened criminal. At heart he was not. In years gone by he had earned his living honestly, but prohibition came, and with it big money for the bootlegger. At first Joe sold a little whisky, just to make a little "extra" money. After a while he found it easier to bootleg than to do toilsome work. The choice eventually cost him a sentence of one year and a day in jail.

After Joe had served his sentence and was again a free man he found that his earthly possessions were reduced to the dilapidated car and a burning desire to "get even" with the man who had sent him to jail.

"Why not rob Judge Kenneshaw's home?" thought he. "It was Kenneshaw that sent me up. They say he has many valuables in his home. I will make this my last job, and get a little money to start again. Bootlegging takes money to make money, same as any other business."

Joe chose a night when the judge was supposed to be away from home. But even the well-made plans of crooks do not work without a hitch at times. The judge was at home, and as Joe was preparing to leave with his loot he found himself face to face with that person, an automatic pointed at his heart.

The crook was quick on the draw. His gun spoke before the judge had time to command him to put up his hands, and Kenneshaw toppled over on the floor, for Joe figured it safer to shoot than submit to arrest.

The crook had no fears of the outcome, for no one had witnessed the shooting, and he made a clean get-away. That is, he had no fear until he saw the morning paper. It told of the shooting and accused Joe Coogaine of the deed. The judge had recognized him as his assailant, and lived just long enough to accuse him as his murderer.

Now his plan was to flee to Mexico.

Through some error the dilapidated car left the main highway and pulled into Sage, a small cow-town in the Cimarron country. By this time the constant fear of being detected was telling on Coogaine. He even dreaded meeting a human being, for fear of being detected. He well know that the law would reach out to the four corners of the continent in an effort to bring him to justice.

Joe had heard of the sand hills of the Cimarron as a safe rendezvous for outlaws. So he discarded his intended trip to Mexico and left his car in a garage at Sage.

A few hours' walk found Joe well back in the hills enjoying the hospitality of a ranchman named Nick Bowman, who needed a good man to do general work around the ranch.

The work tended to keep Joe's mind away from his troubles. Neither Bowman nor any one else suspected him of being a fugitive from justice. But there is something, call it conscience or what you will, that works on every criminal's mind, and it unceasingly worked on Joe's.

Weeks of worry began to tell on Coogaine. He hated his isolation from the gayety of the city and his former comrades. It was pretty severe punishment for Joe.

After going to his room at night, he frequently took the neatly folded newspaper from his pocket and stared at the picture on the front page. Then he would wonder how long it would be before the strong arm of the law would reach out to those hills and find him. As time went on he became cursed with insomnia; for his crime weighed heavily upon his mind. Often he would awake from a horrible dream—of the gallows or of a posse of deputies holding him at bay. He feared the future.

He finally came to a fixed determination. His capture would only be effected at the price of blood.

One evening in his room Joe heard the telephone ring, and he listened as Bowman answered the call. Nick had the habit of partly repeating a conversation:

"This Sheriff McDowell? You say he's wanted for murder? You've seen him? Keep my eyes open? You'll be out here almost any time? Say he's a dangerous character?"

"Luck!" thought Joe, bracing himself. "The sheriff'll be out here! I'll beat it. They'll get hot lead before they will ever take me."

He crawled through his bed-room window and made a break for the horse barn, intending to saddle a broncho to make his escape. As he reached the door of the barn he heard some one moving inside and made a rush for the open.

Following the side of a hill for half a mile, he came to a bluff that looked as if it might afford him protection, except on one side.

There he lay down among the sage brush to rest, and await further developments.

Soon he saw some one creeping stealthily towards him in the dim moonlight. He lay still with his automatic gripped in his hand until the man was nearer. Then his gun spoke, and another shot replied almost simultaneously. The detonations from the two guns echoed and re-echoed among the hills, then all became silent.

Next morning, just after dawn, Sheriff McDowell with two deputies rode up to the ranch house just as Nick Bowman was saddling his horse.

"Seen anything of Two-Gun Lacy?" asked the sheriff.

"Nope," replied Bowman. "Heard some one in my barn last night. Went out to see, but they got away. Little later heard some shooting up in the hills. Just going up to investigate."

A little later Bowman and the officers scrambled up the side of the hill and found Joe Coogaine sprawled out on the ground dead, with his gun still gripped in his hand.

"Of all things!" spoke Nick Bowman. "There's my new hired man!"

"Looks as if he's killed himself," replied the sheriff, as he began examining the dead man's pockets for some clue to his identity.

"Here!" spoke up one of the deputies, who had seen something beside a clump of sage. "Here's the man we are looking for, 'Two Gun' Lacy."

Lacy, too, lay dead with his six-shooter gripped in his hand.

Finding the copy of the newspaper in Joe Coogaine's pocket mute evidence that he was an escaped criminal, the sheriff said:

"Looks to me like these crooks mistook each other for an officer of the law. Anyway, I am glad their bullets took effect for, from all appearances, either would have given us a tough skirmish. The only way we could have taken 'Two Gun' Lacy was after he was dead."

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8 "The Cards of Fate," by William Goode.
9 "Mr. Bachellor's Apartments," by W. H. Osborne.
10 "The Inner Wheel," by Octavius Roy Cohen.
11 "The Voice of the Valley," by Robt. C. Brown.
12 "The Sign of the Seven Sharks," by C. F. Oursler.
13 "Under a Mask," By Crittenden Marriott.
14 "Case 4,444," by Gladys Hall.
15 "After a Million," by Police Captain Howard.
16 "Shadowing the Blue Triangle," by C. F. Oursler.
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34 "After the German Spies," by May Halsey Miller.
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36 "Trained by a French Detective," by Rene Renaud.
37 "A Drop of Ink," by Lieut. Robt. W. Warden.
38 "The Ten Doctors," by Allan Arnold Fox.
39 "The Stain on Page 61," by Chas. T. Jordan.
40 "A Masked Mystery," by Police Sergeant Kelly.
41 "The Black Soul," by Beulah Poynter.
42 "The Sanctuary," by Wm. H. Osborne.
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55 "The Inspector's Strange Case," by B. Poynter.
56 "The Secret of the Sealed Book," by E. Rosemon
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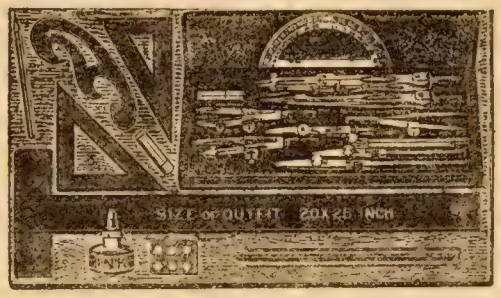

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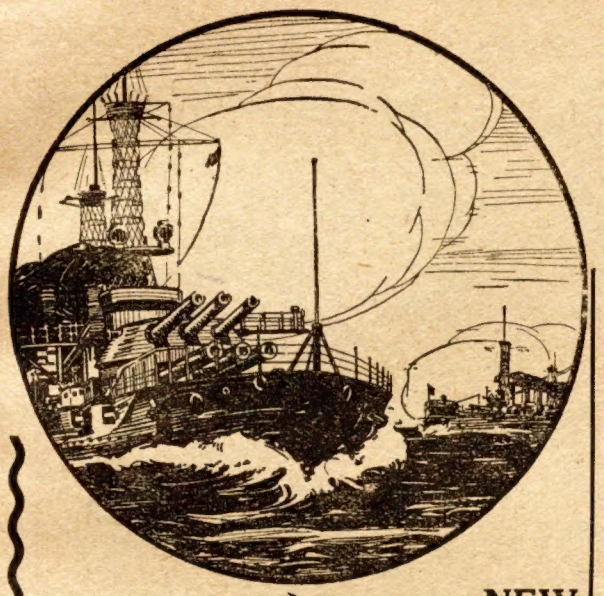

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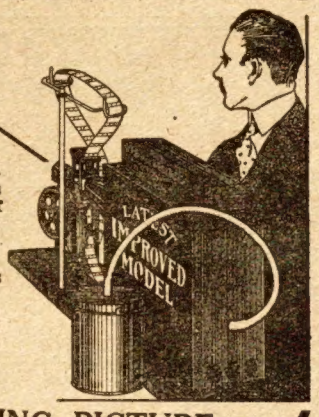

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